THE CLEAVE MYSTERY

LOUIS TRACY

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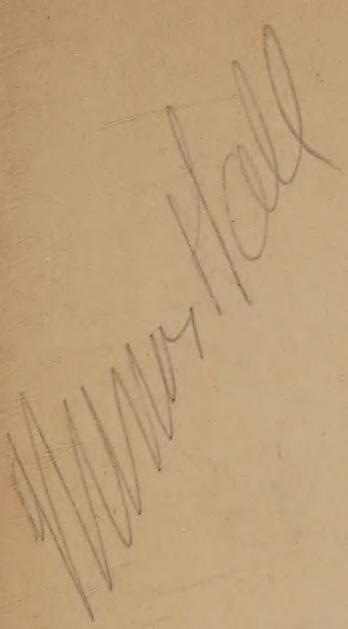

THE GLEAVE MYSTERY

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GLEAVE MYSTERY

BY

LOUIS TRACY

AUTHOR OF "THE BLACK CAT," "THE PASSING OF CHARLES LANSON," ETC., ETC.

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CHAPTER I

A CHANCE STROLL—AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

On a recent evening in May a young man emerged from Queen Anne's Mansions and entered St. James's Park by the neighbouring gate. He was tall and lithe, clear of eye, with face and hands browned by exposure to a fiercer sun than the sulky luminary which has scowled at the British Isles these later years. He wore his clothes with the air peculiar to every straight-backed youngster who is serving or has served in the King's forces. His expression was thoughtful, and well it might be, for he had just heard that an old friend of his mother's, one on whose aid he had counted for a fresh start in life, was dead and buried and very nearly forgotten.

In Birdcage Walk he halted to fill and light his pipe. Then, eyeing the distant line of Piccadilly with the scrutiny of one to whom London was almost unknown, he elected to follow a stream of people crossing the ornamental water in front by a bridge. In effect, he was making for a boarding-house in a quiet street off the Edgware-road, and guessed he would soon strike a diagonal path leading to Hyde Park Corner.

It was a fine evening—too fine to last, for the air was crisp and the atmosphere phenomenally clear. Quite a large number of pedestrians, mainly women and girls, seemed to be going his way, but, being absorbed in his own gloomy if rather nebulous reflections, he did not notice until he had actually reached the Mall

that a line of motor-cars, with very rarely a carriage and pair, was formed along nearly the whole length of that spacious roadway. It stretched unbroken from Marlborough House to Queen Victoria's lofty throne of white marble, and thence was allowed by shepherding policemen to enter the great outer quadrangle of Buckingham Palace.

The born Londoner would determine at a glance that the "last drawing-room of the Season" was in full swing. If a man, he would promptly devise some less congested route to his destination; if a woman, she would squeeze into the crowd which had assembled already, and gaze her fill at the presumably high-born dames and youthful demoiselles favoured with a "command" from the Lord Chamberlain to curtsey before their Majesties. For all that, there was a fair sprinkling of men in the throng lining the south side of the Mall. It is estimated that fifty thousand strangers arrive in London every day during the Season "to be amused," and Diogenes himself might have quitted his tub for once to watch this passing show, gratifying his cynicism not only by the parade of wealth and fashion but also because of the onlookers' attitude.

Your true Cockney, genially impudent by nature, is never at a loss for the right word, though it may often not be the most agreeable one. Hence, when Captain Arthur Colquhoun, D.S.O.,—ex-captain, to be exact, seeing that he was now a civilian—was thrust by chance into this mixed gathering of the few and the many, he was surprised and considerably annoyed by the way in which the more or less charming ladies seated in limousine or landau were chaffed and criticised by the London mob. Be it remembered that he had associated all his life with the grand folk in the carriages and had absolutely no knowledge of the caustic humour of the streets. Perforce a passive listener, he discovered quickly enough that a sort of crude estimate of com-

parative values was formed by the grinning spectators. Each shy, good-looking débutante or more mature society beauty evoked a distinct hum of admiration, which changed to out-spoken sarcasm if the next vehicle contained some less favoured lady whose claims to distinction were other than skin deep.

If the cars had been labelled conspicuously with names, the crowd, then really interested, would have paid far more respect to certain famous dowagers of ample proportions and relays of chins. In the conditions, however, real recognition was rare and almost invariably silent. So, after a few surprised minutes, Colquhoun's irritation passed. The great ones of the earth met badinage mainly with contempt, while the suppressed fury of a few sufferers was equalised, to some extent, by the manifest pleasure displayed by those approved of by King Demos. Escape was, of course, impossible. The long halts, the slanting rays of a summer evening's sun, the too-successful efforts of coach-builders to construct "roomy and well-lighted bodies," forbade any degree of privacy.

Owing to a sudden oscillation among the sightseers by the discovery in one of the carriages of a titled lady who was also a Member of Parliament, Colquhoun was literally forced into the front row. He elbowed rather sharply a man caught in the same eddy.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I could not help butting into you."

"If *you* hadn't apologised, *I* would," said the other. "Neither of us is to blame, unless for being such a blithering idiot as to be here at all."

"I hadn't the faintest notion that such a *tamasha* was going on," said Colquhoun.

"But *I* had. Naturally, being twice your age I have double the capacity for folly."

The second speaker, probably attracted by the Anglo-Indian word for a "show" or popular gathering of any

sort, had looked quickly at his neighbour. Colquhoun, on his part, saw an elderly man taller than himself, and he was nearly a six-footer, whose markedly sardonic features struck him as somehow familiar. It was not that the stranger resembled a "movie" villain, for he smiled quite amiably. But, if the face be a true index of character, this ironic philosopher could snarl like any Mephistopheles. At first sight, he was well dressed. Yet it was evident that his clothes, though of the best quality when fashioned, were pre-war in both texture and style, and all the world knows how such things date a man. As it happened, Colquhoun did not give that second, or appraising, glance until some twenty minutes later. Perhaps the scant knowledge thus obtained would have been useless in any event. When two ships are fated to collide they may sail from the ends of the earth but they shall crash at the destined moment no matter what course they set or signals they fly.

Nevertheless, there were portents about. An ultra-luxurious chariot, a next year's model born seven months before its time, brought forward for inspection a stout, shiny woman and two plump daughters.

"My hat!" cried a girl's shrill voice. " 'Er ole man must ha' stewed some eels in 'is time!"

"Eels!" jibed an admirer who had escorted the critic from Battersea. "Whiles, yer mean! Twig the size o' them pearls! An' they're reel, too. *I* know. I oughter. I sell the other sort at five bob a string."

The stout lady's face and neck crimsoned with wrath, but she was helpless. Such coarse jesting need not necessarily have disturbed the subject of it so greatly; but Colquhoun understood, or thought he did, when the older man muttered:

"Not a bad guess, that! Sir John ran a line of retail fish shops before he passed into trawlers, and found the golden road to a baronetcy via the Great War."

Colquhoun nodded, but said nothing. He would willingly have cuffed the crude little fellow from Battersea, yet, somewhere beneath the crust of his own class consciousness smouldered a fierce resentment fanned almost to a blaze by this ostentatious display of wealth wrung from a suffering world. He did not realise this temperamental storm at the moment. He was simply watchful, and mute, and inclined to wonder at the queer inversion of things in a new after-the-war England.

The procession rolled on. The crowd, encouraged by its own wit, became more candid.

"They're keepin' the best-lookin' ones to the larst," announced the Battersea appraiser of pearls. " 'Ere's the winner! . . . Miss, send in yer phowto to the next Beauty Competition, an' I'll canvass for yer—s'elp me if I don't!"

This direct appeal was made to a quite charming girl whose portrait, if reproduced in colour, would double the sale of any monthly magazine lucky enough to secure such a "study" for its cover. Big blue eyes, violet now in the declining light, a well-shaped nose, a large and laughing mouth, a smooth brow crowned by a mass of brown hair neither bobbed nor shingled, a complexion supplied by the tennis-court and the moorland —these were the outstanding features of a most attractive face. But, above all, this girl had a sense of humour. She was frankly delighted by the tribute from Battersea, and smiled her acceptance of it. She said something to the lady by her side, and the latter, an aristocratic dame of the neo-classical type, peered out benignly, much as Juno may have regarded a flock of bleating sheep on Olympus. Being the nearer of the two she had to turn somewhat in her seat.

Of course, her glance passed over the insignificant little fellow who had spoken. With the bland arrogance of her caste she had eyes only for the two men

whose stature and bearing placed them apart from the common horde. But an intelligence lay behind the languid scrutiny of hauteur.

Colquhoun, she decided instantly, could never have uttered such a blatant compliment. Then she saw his companion, and her expression grew stony, her lips tightened, and her rather delicate nostrils quivered. There was a curious wrinkling of the skin, too, at the corners of her mouth and across her forehead. The most costly of toilet preparations, it would seem, cannot withstand a sudden attack of terror, or loathing, or any other of those tense emotions which have the evil power of adding ten years to the apparent age of a woman.

Colquhoun, it must be admitted, was all eyes for the girl, and the young lady herself was discreetly interested in him. She it was who first became aware that the other man was meeting her companion's frozen stare with a contemptuous tolerance. A ripple of alarm chased the merriment from her face.

"Auntie, what is it?" she cried. "Who is that—person?"

The other woman, it appeared, could not speak. With a fumbling action not devoid of significance in the conditions she sought for and held a dainty handkerchief to her lips with her left hand. With the right she endeavoured to press the girl back in the car as though to shield her from some threatened calamity. Still, she did not withdraw her gaze from the man who had so disturbed her. She could hardly have been more spellbound were she suddenly and completely mesmerised.

But the young woman on her way to make acquaintance with Royalty was neither frightened nor subdued. In fact, she flushed with obvious annoyance.

"Auntie!" she went on imperiously, bending for-

ward against that restraining arm. "How dare that wretched creature behave so rudely?"

Then the "wretched creature" himself laughed, not without a ring of quiet amusement.

"Don't tell her, Maud!" he said. "But I do wish you would not pucker your nose when angry. It's an absurd trick and it invariably delights me, which is not at all what you intend, I'm sure."

The line of cars moved forward. A sort of awed silence fell on the few listeners who had shared in this unexpected episode. Even Battersea was stricken dumb for the moment.

The chief actor was the least concerned of any present. He turned to Colquhoun.

"Had enough of this?" he inquired cheerfully. "Let's go and have a drink!"

Colquhoun knew, of course, that he had heard an extract from some unwritten drama. The lady in the car had said nothing, yet he had not often seen anyone quelled so quickly. It was a shame that her pretty niece should have been startled and irritated, but, in common justice, he had to admit that his companion was not the aggressor. A quite natural pricking of curiosity impelled him to walk at least a little way with the stranger.

"I suppose you're not acquainted with any of those people?" said the other, when they were clear of the crowd and heading toward the Admiralty Arch.

"No. Hardly a soul, I should imagine. I have not been home more than two months all told since 1914, and have spent the last four years in India. There can hardly be any ladies from the Gurkhas in that procession."

"Home on leave?"

"Permanent leave. I was only 'attached.' I had a chance of being taken on, but the economical axe fell, and—here I am."

"No prospects?"

"None."

"Well, take the advice of one who has made a mess of his own life—clear out to the far lands. I recommend the Pacific slope. I'm going there myself, even at fifty, if I get the chance."

Colquhoun did not regard this as a conversational opening. Of late he had been thinking and talking a good deal of California, British Columbia, South Africa, as an outlet for his own energies. But various sorts of lions barred the path to each and all of these distant El Doradoes. If he, at twenty-eight, had met difficulties already, what could he say to this frayed adventurer? Moreover, not being one who wore his heart on his sleeve, he was by no means inclined to discuss his private affairs with a total stranger.

"There's an awful lot of fellows knocking about town who have been left stranded by the war," he commented. "I'm puzzled by my surroundings, I admit. The theatres are packed at outrageous prices. Half London seems to own expensive cars. The hotels are full. You have to wait for a table in a restaurant where food is dear and poor. The women are dressed to beat the band. Yet there are a million and a half unemployed in the country, and one hears nothing but hard luck stories in the service clubs. What's gone wrong with the world—our world?"

"Have you dined?" said his new acquaintance abruptly.

"No—not yet."

"The tag implies that you have at least a supper in prospect. Well, I hate eating alone. Here's a fair offer. Whichever of us has most money in his pocket invites the other to be his guest and chooses his chophouse."

Colquhoun laughed boyishly.

"Sorry," he said. "I daren't accept your chailenge."

"But—dash it all!—I'm no confidence trickster! I have forty pounds tucked away in a wallet fastened to the lining of my coat by a safety pin."

"Good for you! At this moment I am the proud possessor of about one-twentieth of that amount."

"Left wheel, then, up the Duke of York's steps! We'll have a cocktail at the top of the street, and probably find a decent grill a few storeys higher."

"Take me to it," agreed Colquhoun at once.

To exchange a dingy boarding-house for a popular restaurant was distinctly agreeable. Moreover, he felt drawn to this stranger, who, despite the shabby genteel exterior now clearly in evidence, was undoubtedly a gentleman. It was odd, perhaps, that neither sought to ascertain the name of the other. That stage, Colquhoun guessed, would be reached a little later. Meanwhile it was reasonable to believe that his new acquaintance might be honest enough in his desire to escape a lonely evening. Anyhow, there was sufficient savour of adventure in their queer meeting to warrant another hour or two of investigation. He believed, too, from an occasional covert glance he had intercepted, that his would-be host wanted to know more of him. Why, he could not guess. He was not at all conceited. An already modest estimate of his own qualities had not been modified by the experience of the past few weeks. No city in the world can lessen a man's self-importance more speedily and effectually than London when he is searching for work with nothing more up his sleeve than a good character, a fair education and an excellent physique.

The two crossed Waterloo Place and walked up Lower Regent-street. It was not, as shall be seen, so peculiar as it may appear that their disjointed talk should have dealt with trivialities. Each was slightly puzzled, and, when two Englishmen meet in such circumstances, there is bound to be a display of verbal

fencing. Usually, the County Championship in Cricket breaks the ice. The Briton is labelled instantly when he discloses what the American calls his "home town."

The older man led the way to the bar of a famous restaurant. He ordered a couple of cocktails.

"Know this place?" he inquired.

"I have been here twice during the past month," said Colquhoun.

"So you really do not know it? Well, don't cultivate any closer acquaintance. It is the chosen resort of hawks and pigeons—the queer birds of the human race, in effect. Perfect specimens of both types are close to your left elbow. Take a *dekko* * when the opportunity serves, and see if you can pick out the knave and the fool."

Colquhoun asked the bar-tender for a match, and was able to gaze at the pair indicated by his companion.

He saw two dissipated-looking men, each in faultless evening dress, and, to his surprise, failed to detect much difference between them. Their faces were in profile, so their eyes were hidden. They were not even talking animatedly. One man's cheekbones were strongly marked, but the other fellow had the determined chin of a pugilist. It was distinctly annoying that he should fail in such a test, but he was nothing if not straightforward.

"No," he said, after a scrutiny prolonged rather unduly. "If your classification is correct I——"

He stopped, being suddenly aware that a sturdily-built man had pushed in between him and his companion, while another middle-weight stood in reserve, as it were.

Something had been said, he knew not what, but the expression on his newly-made acquaintance's stark features showed that the communication was an unpleasant one.

* Anglo-Indian for "have a look."

"Is this really necessary?" came the harsh question.

"Yes, absolutely," said the man near Colquhoun.

"Well, needs must when the devil drives! . . . Sorry, friend from beyond the seas, but I must leave you at once. I may not even apologise, but just go."

The speaker turned to the man who had addressed him while Colquhoun was looking the other way.

"This youngster has nothing to do with me," he went on grimly. "I don't even know his name. We met by chance in St. James's Park. For goodness' sake, don't worry *him!*"

Without another word the three men walked toward the exit, leaving Colquhoun to stare after them in blank amazement. But, flurried though he undoubtedly was, he could not help being aware that many shrewd eyes had noted the incident, and were now focussed on him. There was no reason, however, why he should not finish his cocktail. A barman was wiping the counter close at hand, so he sought enlightenment.

"Did you see that?" he said in a low tone.

"Wot am I 'ere for?" was the answer. " 'Tecs from the Yard, them two. Dunno 'oo yer friend was, but, if I was you, I'd hop it."

"Why should *I* hop it?"

"You'll find out now all right," muttered the other, becoming suddenly interested in a collection of soiled glasses.

A quietly-dressed man, of Colquhoun's height and build, but considerably his senior, approached and said in a friendly way:

"Would you mind giving me your name and address? Allow me to explain that I represent the Criminal Investigation Department."

"Do you, indeed?" said Colquhoun tartly. "Is the Criminal Investigation Department worried about me?"

"I don't know—yet. If you are what you look—a young army officer on leave in London—I should imagine it is not."

The speaker's tone and manner were altogether devoid of offence. He conveyed that he was putting a formal question, which, when answered satisfactorily, would end a trivial if slightly embarrassing incident. By this time Colquhoun was aware that the newcomer's right eye was noticeably larger than the left one, and this bizarre fact helped to restore his normal condition of smiling tolerance of every phase of life, good, bad or indifferent.

"You are nearly right," he said. "My name is Arthur Colquhoun, and, until two months ago, I was a captain in the Indian Army. I am staying at a small boarding-house in Cambridge Terrace, Hyde Park. Is that against the law?"

"No, sir." This with a humorous twinkle of both eyes, big and little. "Are you acquainted with the man who has just gone out with two of my colleagues?"

"No. I met him in St. James's Park half an hour ago. We were watching a procession of ladies to a Drawing-room at the Palace—and—he invited me here."

"That's all right, sir. May I say he is not the sort of person you could make a friend of? He has just been released after serving eleven out of a sentence of fourteen years' penal servitude."

"Great Scott! What did he do?"

"He was convicted of forgery, embezzlement and manslaughter."

"The devil he was! Some lad, eh? I summed him up as a retired Indian civilian, with a liver and a bad temper! It was a natural blunder. He recognised a lady taking a débutante to the Court, and addressed her as 'Maud.' She knew him, too—and, really—inspector—he was the less flurried of the two."

" 'Maud,' " repeated the detective. "I wonder who that could be! I must try and find out."

"But who is this elderly ruffian? What's his name?"

"In the conditions, I think I ought to tell you. He is Sir Maurice Gleave, fifteenth baronet, and—er—Why, what's the matter now?"

Colquhoun was no weakling, but he had just received a shock calculated to stagger any ordinary human being, and his face showed it.

"Sir Maurice Gleave!" he muttered in accents husky with emotion. "Sir Maurice Gleave is the man who murdered my father eleven years ago!"

CHAPTER II

COLQUHOUN ENTERS ON THE NEW LIFE

During a few seconds he was almost unconscious of his environment. The veil which seemed to obscure the present served also to reveal the past. It was a hateful discovery that he had actually accepted some small measure of hospitality from the one person on earth whom he wanted to strangle with his naked hands. True, the storm and stress of the long years of war—drawn out interminably for white troops in India by an aftermath of unsettled political conditions —had driven from his mind all active memories of the tragedy which literally caused his mother's death and ruined his own career. But youth never wholly forgets. Early impressions are apt to remain vivid long after the perhaps more important events of later life grow dim and blurred. Though at a tutor's preparing for Oxford when his father was killed, while kindly efforts were made to shut off from his ken the more tragic elements of the affair, he could not help seeing photographs of Sir Maurice Gleave in the newspapers, while he had actually met the man more than once at his own home in the Isle of Wight.

Then a friendly voice dispelled the mists.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am for having bungled matters so badly," the detective was saying. "I ought to have remembered your father's name, of course. My only excuse is that eleven years ago I was a police-constable in Cumberland, and gave little heed to matters outside my own district. Oddly enough—but, we cannot talk here—won't you come outside?"

The man's obvious sincerity was helpful.

"Wait one moment!" said Colquhoun, crooking a finger at the barman. "What is your charge for a cocktail?" he inquired.

"A shilling, sir."

"Well, here is a shilling in payment for the drink I have just had. Will you kindly take a shilling out of the till and put it in the Hospitals collection box I see there? Yes, I mean just that," for the attendant looked puzzled. "I did not know it at the time, but I cannot possibly drink in friendship with the criminal who has just left this place under arrest."

"Right you are, guv'ner," came the cheerful answer. The barman, an ex-soldier, was glad to believe that one in whom he recognised an officer-sahib was not in bad odour with the authorities. Something was "up," of course. Luckily, this nice-looking young fellow was not "in it."

The detective did not speak again until he had piloted Colquhoun across two lines of traffic and they stood in safety on the pavement of Shaftesbury Avenue.

"Are you free for half an hour?" he said then.

"For many half hours," was the haphazard reply.

"Well, I'm going to have a snack with a colleague in a neighbouring restaurant. Will you join us?"

Colquhoun was not a nervous subject. He had recovered his wits already, and now he was forced to smile.

"Of course, you cannot possibly have guessed," he said, "that I had accepted an invitation to dine with Sir Maurice Gleave when you and your merry men broke up the party?"

"No. All the more reason you should come with me. I am sure there are things you ought to discuss with Mr. Furneaux. He is one of the leading men at the 'Yard', and has this business at his fingers' tips. I

haven't. Candidly, I am puzzled. By the way, my name is Sheldon."

"Well, Mr. Sheldon, you may be puzzled, but I feel like one wandering in a jungle who has just viewed a man-eating tiger. I am in no fit humour for any festive gathering."

"You'll be all right when you see Signor Vittorio Pucci, proprietor of a little Italian restaurant famous for the best-cooked dinners in London. One glance at Pucci is a tonic. He never eats a square meal, but tastes everything supplied to his patrons, yet he turns the scale at two hundred and fifty pounds. There's a testimonial for you! He has only one secret sorrow. Mr. Furneaux, who dines there frequently, doesn't pull down half that total. Pucci cannot understand it. If he didn't love Furneaux as a brother he would refuse to cater for him. It's almost a scandal that any human being should partake regularly of Pucci's best dishes and yet resemble a light-weight jockey."

Colquhoun was well aware that this pleasant-spoken detective was deliberately heading him off the one topic which might reasonably engross his attention. Still, the excuse was plausible enough. It appeared that some "Mr. Furneaux" was well posted in the intricacies of a mysterious affair, whereas he (Sheldon) was not. But Colquhoun felt that the officials of the C.I.D. must have been perturbed by some incident or set of circumstances, altogether apart from the queer coincidence of his jostling his father's slayer in the Mall, while the two were watching the slow procession of celebrities bound for Buckingham Palace. Sir Maurice Gleave might have gone there by design, but that Colquhoun himself should be in that spot at that particular hour was a matter of the merest chance, an accident depending on so many trivial unrelated conditions that the final outcome became quite impossible as a prearranged thing.

"Your description of Pucci's prowess gives me an appetite," he said. "I can only hope that the hour is not too late for a display of his skill."

Sheldon nodded approval of this counter-stroke. He was glad that the younger man had taken his point so readily.

"That's all right," he said confidently. "The dinner is ready. I promised to turn up at a quarter past eight, and Pucci always allows for an unexpected guest. In fact there may be four of us tonight."

Signor Pucci, proprietor of the Ristorante Milano, a spick and span eating-house situated in the heart of Soho, did most certainly advertise his own wares. In shape and colour he resembled a gigantic egg on which had been glued an array of white linen, an evening dress suit, and a set of remarkably small hands and feet. His black hair and patent leather shoes shone with equal lustre. Like the majority of really fat men he moved with surprising ease and swiftness. He saw Sheldon the moment the door opened, and had crossed half the floor space of the main dining-room before Colquhoun could enter.

"Goot evening, sare," he gurgled cordially. "Your frents are up the stair, yes. Four places?"

"Oh! The Chief is here, too, Professor?" said Sheldon.

"*Si.* He say he wait five meenit—no longaire."

"Right-o! Hurry up Pietro with the cocktails."

Colquhoun followed his guide up a steep, narrow staircase into a cosy and tastefully furnished room on the first floor. Here he was introduced to Superintendent Winter, C.B.E., a powerfully-built man who looked like a breeder of pedigree cattle, and Chief Inspector Furneaux, a wizened little chip of a fellow whose wrinkled features and amazingly bright eyes suggested a popular comedian, though his thin, wiry frame lent piquancy to Sheldon's description.

Winter's rounded eyebrows became veritable arches when he heard Colquhoun's name, but Furneaux cried instantly, in a piping falsetto which indicated an extreme surprise:

"Surely not Captain *Arthur* Colquhoun?"

"It's sad, but it's true," said Colquhoun.

"Late of the Indian Army?"

"As per description in passport produced," and the soldier took from an inside pocket one of the salmon-tinted folders bound in dark blue linen, which the Great War has made indispensable to all Britons who travel far afield.

Furneaux did not hesitate to open and examine it.

"The plot thickens!" he cackled shrilly. "But how and when did you come on the stage?"

"Captain Colquhoun will throw the picture on the screen when Pietro deposits the next exhibits—four cocktails, to wit," said Winter.

"Is one of those meant for me?" inquired Colquhoun.

"Yes."

"Well, I've just had one, and two are not good for the troops, but I'll break the regulations this time. The first disagreed with me."

The senior men from the "Yard" understood his comment when they heard what had happened during the preceding three-quarters of an hour. He told his story with soldier-like accuracy. He had a good memory, and repeated word for word the snatches of talk between Sir Maurice Gleave and himself. He did not fail to recall the fleeting impression that he had met the man somewhere many years earlier.

"He had the same notion in regard to me," he added. "Of course, now I know why. I am supposed to resemble my father rather markedly. Had he inquired my name——"

"Just as well he didn't," broke in Winter. "If you're

as fit as you look, young man, you will give five minutes' uninterrupted attention to that *sole Margery*, while Mr. Sheldon 'phones Vine-street and finds out what is going on there."

"Has Gleave been arrested on some other charge?" Colquhoun could not help asking.

"No. Not exactly. He is being invited to explain his brother's rather definite belief that he means mischief. By the way, do you know anything about Mr. Francis Gleave?"

"Not even the fact that he exists."

"Good. Well, keep away from these Gleaves. Of course, it is not necessary for me to warn you that any idea of wreaking personal vengeance on the man responsible for your father's death is absurd and dangerous."

"Even unfair," put in Furneaux.

"How—unfair?" demanded Colquhoun.

His voice was well under control, for men hardened to physical risks learn the trick of outward detachment when they speak. But his blue eyes met the little detective's black ones without flinching, and they held the glint of bright steel.

Furneaux affected to take him seriously.

"In the first place," he said, "Sir Maurice Gleave has been punished by the law—punished with inflexible rigour when one realises what a sentence of penal servitude means to one of his social standing. Secondly, I am not wholly convinced that your father died because of the physical scuffle which took place inside the bank on that unhappy occasion. Sir Maurice never wavered in his statement that Mr. Colquhoun fell, and thus sustained a fatal injury, the nature of which was not fully determined. Thirdly, both judge and jury were swayed by the knowledge that Sir Maurice had been party to a series of forgeries and embezzlements. For some reason, the authorities never really got to the

bottom of that feature of the case. 'Murder will out' says the old saw, which, like many another tag of proverbial philosophy, is profoundly inaccurate. However, in this instance it may be justified. Here comes Sheldon with news, and Pietro with the roast. The news will keep. Take my advice and watch the Chief carving a fowl. It is a liberal education in the fine art of dining. You would never suspect from his seeming impartiality that he contrives to retain the best slices for himself."

A pallid Italian waiter staged a superb capon escorted by a bevy of diminutive French sausages. But he had been well trained. He did not remain in the room a second longer than was needed to arrange the various dishes.

Winter's attention was given wholly to the edge of a long narrow-bladed knife. Apparently satisfied, he looked inquiringly at Sheldon.

"Vine-street saw no reason whatever for detaining Sir Maurice," said the latter instantly. "He denied having written to his brother. There has been no sort of communication between them. Indeed, he vowed that if any trouble exists it is because Francis's conscience has a thousand several tongues, each condemning him as a villain. I must admit that the inspector reported the phrase as 'several thousand tongues,' but Sir Maurice would not so misquote Shakespeare. He supplied his address—a small hotel off the Strand—and Vine-street checked it in his presence. Moreover, he offered to call again tomorrow, as he wanted to know exactly what that wretched fellow, Francis, is up to."

"Just what I expected," said Winter. "Now, Captain Colquhoun, it will be a capital idea if we talk of something more agreeable than crime, which, when analysed, is nearly always intensely sordid. It may interest you, too, to compare Mr. Furneaux's appetite

with mine. You may be surprised, even distressed, but you will at least be able to measure the disdain with which I treated his miserable insinuations against my high repute as a carver."

"To begin with, may I say, sir, that never before have I seen the wings and legs of a chicken whipped off in two strokes," said Colquhoun.

"Well put!" grinned Furneaux. "Our beloved Chief revels in compliments. He blushes like a school-girl when an Old Bailey judge mumbles some incoherent comments on the marked ability shown by the 'officers engaged in this case,' though the said case may have been the merest child's play compared with another in which the suspect escaped through lack of what lawyers call evidence."

"Do you score many failures, then?" said Colquhoun, by way of polite conversation.

"Sheldon and I—frequently. Mr. Winter—never. You see, being boss, he picks out all the soft jobs for himself."

"Alas!" sighed Winter, "I am only human, so cannot deal personally with every demand made on the 'Yard.' I spend an awful lot of time, too, in correcting or explaining away the blunders of my associates."

It was evident to Colquhoun that further reference to Sir Maurice Gleave was taboo. Indeed, the man's name was not mentioned again during the evening. The pleasant little gathering broke up soon after nine, and the soldier, smoking an excellent Havana supplied by the Chief, walked to his boarding-house. Naturally, his thoughts dwelt on the sequence of strange events which had beset his path since he entered St. James's Park at half past seven. London had, indeed, thrown wide the gates of adventure, but he was so far, as yet, from realising the possibilities of the new vista opening up before his eyes, that when his latch-key turned in the lock of an unattractive boarding-house it was the

dun interior which smacked of reality, while all else seemed to be of the stuff of which dreams are made.

He slept soundly, however, and despite the weather portents of the previous day, awoke into a world of sunshine and blue skies.

His morning paper gave a list of presentations at Court, and a painstaking search through several columns of names revealed one item which struck a faint chord of memory. It read:

"Miss Evelyn Mary Hilton, by her aunt, the Viscountess Weybourne."

He recalled that his mother had a friend who became a peeress, and he believed the title was taken from the village of Weybourne in Norfolk. Here was a possible connection with Sir Maurice Gleave, who came from a Norfolk family. It was a slender peg on which to hang a theory, but he could find none other, and in the whole list there were not many aunts who presented nieces; so he noted the names and went out. His present abode yielded no more authoritative works of reference than a telephone directory and an antiquated railway guide; he would look up a "peerage" in his Club.

The whim seized him that he would now follow the track across the parks he had meant to use on the previous evening. Entering Hyde Park at the Marble Arch he took the broad path which ends at the statue of Achilles. He was passing Stanhope Gate when a girl in a dark blue dress trimmed with red silk, and wearing a dainty little blue toque carrying a red cockade, came swiftly along a side path. His mind was so absorbed with his own affairs that he would not have noticed her were it not for her companion, or escort, a handsome and most intelligent-looking Borzoi. Having hunted a bobbery pack in India he had an appraising eye for every variety of sporting dog, and this one appealed by reason of its poise, as the expert knows

at a glance whether a long-legged hound has been galloped regularly with a horse or left to grow into a weedy pet. It was literally true that he did not gaze at the girl at all, but he became aware suddenly that she was standing stock still and staring at him.

Then he realised that the very considerable difference between a court dress with ostrich feathers and a smart walking costume could not affect the animated face and unspoiled complexion of this young woman in particular. He was so taken by surprise that he lifted his hat and blurted out:

"Didn't I see you yesterday? Are you Miss Hilton?"

It was not remarkable that the girl should have recognised him, seeing that his clothes were those he had worn overnight. Indeed, it soon became evident that she had meant addressing him in any event. But she was more startled than he imagined.

"You know my name, then?" she said, readily enough, but with a slight hauteur that was disconcerting, because he saw, a second too late, that his too-accurate guess called for a good deal of explanation.

"I plead guilty to a feeling of curiosity," he said, reddening under her calm scrutiny. "I looked in a newspaper for an account of the festivities, and came to the conclusion that Lady Weybourne must be the 'auntie' of our somewhat curious meeting."

"But we have never met before, have we?"

"Not to my knowledge. Does it matter?"

"Not in the least. Of course, I am responsible for stopping you now. My excuse is that I want to know the name of the man who was so rude to Lady Weybourne last evening."

By this time they were facing each other little more than a yard apart. The dog thrust his nose into the palm of Colquhoun's hand, and then looked up at his mistress as much as to say:

"Why are you so stand-off? This fellow is all right. He is one of us."

Colquhoun, rather nettled by the girl's manner, did the very last thing he would have dreamed of doing in normal condition—he took up the cudgels in behalf of Sir Maurice Gleave!

"I think you are mistaken," he said quietly. "He was not the aggressor. Lady Weybourne said nothing, it is true, but she tried to freeze him with a look, and failed rather lamentably."

"But—who was he?"

"I had not the least notion. I did not know then that I had seen him many years ago, when I was a small boy."

"That implies you know now who he is, at any rate."

"I have been told, I admit. My name, by the way, is Colquhoun—Arthur Colquhoun."

"Really, Mr. Colquhoun, it must be quite obvious that I would never have halted you in the Park to inquire *your* name. What I want to find out is that of your companion."

By this time she was flushed, and her eyes were sparkling. Colquhoun had an absurd suspicion that she wanted to lay into him with the stout dog-whip she carried.

"I think you ought to ask Lady Weybourne," he said. "Undoubtedly she can tell you far more about him than I."

"She refuses to discuss him. Yet I cannot imagine why you, who are acquainted with none of us, should make such a secret of a simple matter."

"But it may not be a simple matter. There are some names, Miss Hilton, the mere mention of which in your presence would be a profanation. This man's name is in that category."

The wrath of a vexed goddess was not to be turned aside by a soft answer.

"I'm sorry," she said icily. "Come along, Cæsar. Let's go and have a look at the rabbits."

"Rabbits!" cried Colquhoun. "Rabbits in Hyde Park!"

Probably no other word in the English language would have detained that girl another second, but she condescended to dart a critical and less imperious look at this somewhat unusual young man.

"Is London strange to you?" she said.

"It is becoming stranger every hour."

"Then you will find plenty of rabbits in an enclosure near the Serpentine and opposite Albert Gate. It may interest you to see them—some other time."

And she sped off, walking with the swift ease of Atalanta in Arcadia, with Cæsar trotting at her heels.

CHAPTER III

THE WAY OF A MAID WITH A MAN

COLQUHOUN watched Miss Evelyn Mary Hilton and her dog until both disappeared among the trees and flowering shrubs which adorn that section of Hyde Park. He made no pretence at polite behaviour. He hoped the young lady would look back at least once, when he would have waved her a friendly farewell. Not that he felt in the least friendly. He believed that any such action on his part would have annoyed her, and that was exactly what he wanted.

But she disappointed him. Somehow, the very set of her shapely shoulders conveyed a sense of displeasure at his mere existence.

He was tempted to follow her. If there were rabbits to be gazed at (he rather doubted the fact at that time of the day) they were free to all men as well as to all women and hounds.

Happily, his common sense prevented that banality. He would never have even thought of it were he not irritated—"peeved," as the excellent American slang word has it. Then the crazy absurdity of the situation struck him, and he laughed, but with such a total absence of mirth that a passing nursemaid caught a small boy by the hand and quickened her pace.

His pipe having gone out, he halted at the base of the frightful statue of Achilles, that enduring libel on the artistic taste of the early Victorian "women of England." He was striking a match when two natives of India approached from the direction of Hyde Park Corner. Except for small, tight-fitting turbans their

attire was soberly European, but Colquhoun knew them for Mahrattas, members of an always turbulent people inhabiting the hills and high-perched plateaus of the Bombay Presidency. He would not have given them a second glance were it not for the striking intellectuality of their faces. As a rule, the Mahratta bears himself as what he is, a born soldier, but this pair had travelled far from the physical characteristics and outward semblance of a warlike race. They were not young—perhaps fifty—and they might have been professors in some University. But Colquhoun intercepted the look which each gave him, and was aware instantly of a belief that if the eyes are windows of the soul he had glimpsed the shrouded spirits of fiends rather than men. He imagined, too, that they took him for an Anglo-Indian, and hated him in consequence.

Another queer notion flitted through his brain as they walked past. He remembered having read quite recently an article in a magazine in which the writer, a Doctor of Divinity, spoke of some malignant influence termed "cosmic evil" as being a very real and harmful force in the world's life. For a second or so Colquhoun felt that he had just come in contact with this very thing in its human manifestation.

Of course, being a healthy-minded young Briton, with the instincts and training of the class so well defined by the phrase "an officer and a gentleman," he shook off this absurd phantasy at once. For all that, however, he turned in his tracks and watched the Indians from a distance. Keeping fully a hundred yards in rear he followed them all the way back to the Marble Arch. Here they waited in a group formed at the point where west-bound omnibuses halt, and, after a slight delay, mounted a vehicle conspicuously labelled "West Ealing."

"So much for that!" grinned Colquhoun to himself. "I wonder when I shall cease acting like a bally idiot!"

Still, he could not help indulging in certain definite musings on the queer, rather abnormal, incidents which had been his lot since he elected to cross St. James's Park from Queen Anne's Gate the previous evening. Hitherto the few weeks spent in London had yielded nothing but sheer monotony, combined with a growing heart-sickness which he had resolved to end, no matter what the cost. He was not yet poverty-stricken. When he left the army, he had about £800 to his credit. Of this sum, acting on the advice of a banker, he had invested £500 in two well-established 6 per cent trustee stocks. The remainder he regarded as working capital. Half had gone already, for his wardrobe needed replenishing after many years in the East. Before the £150 now lodged in the bank neared exhaustion he had determined to leave England for the South or West, and endeavour to start life afresh in a new land.

So far as he could see he was unfitted for any of the few vacancies which offered prospects at home, except such jobs as driving a car or joining the unskilled staff of a railway company or big commercial establishment. These, he knew, were dead ends. He might be forced into some such employment in the Colonies, but he certainly would not begin that way in England.

It was, therefore, almost bewildering to find himself suddenly whisked out of the drab environment of one seeking work almost hopelessly into a morbid atmosphere of mystery. He saw already that it would be foolish to think of wreaking vengeance on Sir Maurice Gleave for his father's death. But the attitude of haughty Miss Evelyn Mary Hilton was out of the common order of things, and he had hardly recovered from its cold *douche* before he fell victim to a species of bewitchment arising from the mere presence in Hyde Park of two quite ordinary East Indians of the higher class. Really, it was too absurd. He must pull him-

self together. When he reached his Club he would read the morning papers, "chew the rag" with other hard-up ex-officers like himself, have a bite of luncheon, and blow himself to an afternoon's Bridge, win or lose. In a word, he would get back to normality as a tonic.

Such was his definite programme when, again passing Stanhope Gate, he ran into Miss Hilton and her dog a second time. On this occasion, as before, the girl's eyes were quicker than his. She saw him coming, and, though he did not know it, was minded to retreat. But, as shall be seen, she was not of the order which shirks a difficulty. After a momentary hesitation she continued on her way, and the two met almost at the identical spot where they parted.

Colquhoun's solid, commonsense, John Bull resolutions collapsed at once. Without the least hesitation he faced her and raised his hat.

"I've changed my mind," he said. "There's lots of things I want to tell you. Will you listen?"

She eyed him with a degree of curiosity, but her manner was not quite so frigid as on the first occasion. Moreover, this young man was not bad to look upon, he was indubitably one of her own class.

"I only asked you to tell me one thing, and you refused," she said, with a frankness and fearlessness that he found attractive. Cæsar, of course, recognised him at once, and thrust forward his muzzle again to be patted.

"You see," smiled Colquhoun. "I have an ally, and dogs never err in such matters. Now, I do believe in all honesty that you and I ought to have a long talk. Will you give me half an hour?"

"Half an hour!" repeated the girl rather breathlessly, but smiling in her turn. "One does not need half an hour to answer a simple question as to a man's identity."

"No," he admitted. "I can tell you straight off that

the person who addressed Lady Weybourne as 'Maud' is Sir Maurice Gleave."

"I have never heard of him," and her eyes rounded in puzzled candour.

"How old are you?"

She laughed amusedly.

"If you took thought for a moment you would not be in any doubt on that point," she said. "However, it is a fair exchange. I am nineteen."

"I wanted to make sure. Eleven years ago Sir Maurice Gleave, a fifteenth baronet, I believe, was sentenced to a long period of imprisonment for—for manslaughter—and other crimes. He has just been released."

"Oh, crikey!" said Miss Hilton.

The school-girl exclamation, the sheer bewilderment in her face, gave proof, if proof were needed, of utter lack of acquaintance with the fifteenth baronet and his lurid past.

"You see now why, having said so much, I should say a great deal more?" he persisted.

"No. I don't really."

"Well, I am quite sure of it. But I don't feel like making a long speech in the middle of this path." He turned, looked across the Park, and pointed.

"Beneath that sycamore over there," he went on, "there are two seats. Let us occupy them for at least five minutes. If, at the end of that time, you are not interested, say so, and I'll remove myself hurriedly."

"Is that a sycamore?" she said. "I always thought it was a plane-tree."

He was checked for an instant, not being versed in the feminine art of evading the point really at issue.

"It is incorrectly so described in Scotland, and, I believe, in America," he replied.

"Why, I wonder?"

"Such blunders arise generally from lack of knowledge."

"But Scots and Americans are usually such brainy people."

"I give in," he said. "Sycamore or plane-tree, will you go so far with me?"

"You have certainly excited my curiosity, Mr. Colquhoun," she said, glancing at a wrist-watch. "It is only a quarter past ten. I have to be at a Court photographer's at twelve. Auntie insists on a full-length photograph in my presentation gown."

"You will be glad of it when you are forty. My mother was proud of hers, which I regard now as by far the most charming picture I possess. Some day, when I am rich, I shall have it reproduced, life size, by the most eminent painter available."

"I like to hear of a man being devoted to his mother."

"That is part of my story. She died of grief when my father was killed. Sir Maurice Gleave is the man who killed him."

He did not look at the girl when he uttered words which must have shocked her profoundly. Had he done so he would have seen that for a second or two she blanched, and an undefinable terror flickered in those brave eyes. They reached the tree in silence, and Cæsar stretched his long limbs across his mistress's feet. While watching the dog Colquhoun noticed that his new acquaintance wore silk stockings which matched the hue of her dress, while her dark blue shoes were strapped with red leather of the exact tint of the material used to relieve the severity of the costume. Such small details were eloquent of ample means. Whoever Miss Evelyn Mary Hilton might be she could afford to dress expensively and in good taste.

He hardly expected her to speak. She was not one, he believed, who wore her heart on her sleeve. Ready

enough with quip or repartee in ordinary conversation, it was most unlikely that in view of the tragedy he had blurted out so unreservedly she would take refuge behind a conventional phrase of dismay or blank surprise.

"You understand now," he said, seemingly unaware of her silence, "why I refused at first to tell you who the man was who stood by my side in the Mall last night. Lady Weybourne recognised him. Of that there cannot be the slightest doubt, even if he had kept his mouth closed. If she refused you an explanation it was not for me to be less discreet—shall I put it? That is what I thought at first, and I would not have changed my mind if Fate, or mere coincidence, had not thrown us together a second time within a few minutes. Honestly, I was just as much annoyed by your attitude as you were by my refusal to answer what must have appeared to you an ordinary question. It was not, you will agree now. But Fate—please excuse the word: it best expresses my meaning—took a hand at the moment I had determined to walk on and leave a rather domineering young lady to her own devices. Something happened, something either absurdly trivial or really remarkable, which led me back to the Marble Arch. Then I met you again, and I was aware of an overwhelming desire to take you into my confidence. Do you mind?"

It was rather adroit of him to give the girl time to collect her thoughts. She soon showed that she had listened intently.

"I agree that having begun you must go on," she said.

Her manner was composed, but her voice had lost its fine confidence. Colquhoun suspected at once that some long-forgotten knowledge was being revived, and the belief was profoundly disconcerting. The only motive he could suggest for his own action was that which he had given—an all-powerful impulse to confide

in some other human being—and it was not wholly disagreeable that the sympathetic ear should be that of a young and nice-looking woman. He resolved forthwith to try and clear himself of any intent to distress her unduly.

"I hope you don't imagine, because Lady Weybourne and Sir Maurice Gleave were so well acquainted in the old days that he can address her now by her Christian name, that I am such a perfect ass as to lay any stress on the fact," he said doggedly. "That, indeed, would be ludicrous. The man is well born, and must have mixed in good society before his downfall. The probability is that he was on intimate terms with half the aristocracy of Great Britain. No, no. Please disabuse your mind of that notion. It will help if I explain exactly what happened last night. It's a queer, disjointed sort of yarn, but it's true, and there's a saying that truth is stranger than fiction. Forgive me if I start by a sentence or two about myself. If you realise how completely I have been cut off from life in England since 1914 you will be better able to understand the strangeness of events during the past few hours."

"I promise you I won't interrupt," murmured the girl.

For some inexplicable reason that colourless comment sounded encouraging. Slowly and haltingly at first, because his actual knowledge of the facts was hazy, Colquhoun told her how his father was manager and Sir Maurice Gleave chairman of an old-established country bank which they practically owned, it being one of those private undertakings which were popular enough in England until recent years. It was about to be absorbed by one of the giant joint stock banks, and on highly favourable terms, when it was discovered that its assets, instead of being invested in solid securities, were largely hypothecated to bolster up certain ill-managed and over-capitalised shipping companies.

The rights and wrongs of this side of the affair Colquhoun knew nothing of. The tragic fact remained that when exposure became inevitable, his father charged Sir Maurice with malfeasance of the bank's funds and with wilfully misleading him as to their disposition. This led to a bitter quarrel, a physical struggle, and the elder Colquhoun's death. In quick succession came the trial, Mrs. Colquhoun's collapse, the loss of the family fortune in liquidation proceedings and the outbreak of the Great War.

Thenceforth the narrator stood on surer ground. Perforce abandoning all hope of going through a University, he enlisted at once in the regular army, was in France in time to share in the Third Battle of Ypres, and was lucky enough to render some service to an Indian Brigadier, which led to a commission, and, when the Armistice came, to a transfer to the Gurkhas.

Despite her promise, Evelyn Hilton did interrupt then.

"What did you do for the Brigadier?" she asked.

"Oh, the dear old boy made out that I had saved his life," confessed Colquhoun, with the self-conscious blush of one who has been praised unjustly. "It's true I hauled him out of a tight place, but the only thing that worried me was his weight. Unfortunately for me, he was the fattest man in the Indian Army, and I had to carry him along eight hundred yards of the worst main communication trench on the Western Front."

The girl nodded. She thought she could fill in the gaps.

Of course, neither of these young people gave the least consideration to a scene in the Venice of long ago, when another soldier discoursed to a maid of stirring times in the tented field. She loved him, 'tis said, for the dangers he had passed, and he loved her that she did pity them. Desdemona certainly gave Othello

the broadest of broad hints beforehand, but she knew what she was about, for the swarthy Moor was a man of alien race. Be that as it may, Evelyn did not let Arthur wriggle away from his first-rate army record. Rank, decorations, and reasons for leaving the service were wormed out of him before he was allowed to leave Queen Anne's Mansions and enter St. James's Park the previous evening.

With the unfailing divination of her sex she fastened on to the salient points of the story.

"What did that funny little man, Mr. Furneaux, mean by his hints that perhaps Sir Maurice Gleave might have been as much sinned against as sinning?" she inquired, stooping to clutch Cæsar's collar, because that blue-blooded hound objected to the too near approach of a man who wanted to collect the hire of the chairs.

"I don't know," said Colquhoun. "To tell the truth, I was afraid to press him for a definition. He might have said something derogatory to my father's memory, and I couldn't have stood that."

"You are mistaken. Your description of those detectives is too accurate for such a thing to be possible. If Mr. Furneaux believed that some sort of moral responsibility was attached to your father he would never have passed the remark."

Colquhoun, in his calm moments, was fully capable of solving this small logical problem on his own account. At present, his wits were not working in their accustomed grooves, so he regarded Miss Hilton as a psycho-analyst of the first order.

"By Jove! That's clever of you!" he cried.

They were interrupted by the need to pay for a couple of sad-coloured tickets. The girl's attention was given to the dog, who knew quite well that the collector was a wretched fellow who ought to be scared off the premises. So, for a few fleeting seconds of barter, Colquhoun took stock of his companion in profile. She

was slender, but most gracefully formed. Her left arm, its hand tense on Cæsar's collar, revealed sinews of whipcord beneath its delicately rounded contour. Her limbs were in perfect proportion. A not too small foot was not cramped in undersized shoes. Instep and ankle would have served as a model for the most fastidious of sculptors. Her waist was flexible as any dryad's, and the line of her back rose sheerly straight till it merged in the curve of her neck. Masses of shining brown hair were tucked away beneath the dainty toque, and there was a whimsical charm about the corner of her mouth, which, however, was set now in a peculiar intentness, as of one determined to check any undue glibness of speech.

Her voice he had already found delightful. Its sweet cadences, its blend of the conscious self-possession of class with a wholly unconscious maidenly shyness, fell on his ears like notes of limpid music.

Suddenly, just as the intruder vanished, she seemed to become aware of Colquhoun's scrutiny, which, indeed, was neither critical nor ill-mannered but altogether reverent.

Her lips tightened a little more, but, astonishingly mistress of herself for one so young, she felt she could bide her time. Being well aware of a too rapid growth of understanding with this somewhat outspoken soldier, she was resolved to check it peremptorily.

"You spoke of an incident which happened before we met a second time—what was that?" she said.

He told of the two Mahrattas, and the queer spell they cast on him.

"Honestly," he admitted, "I'm at a loss for words to explain it now. I've heard of natives of India exercising occult powers, but, though I have lived in the country several years, I never came across the least manifestation of it. There is nothing to be surprised at in that, because army society is all one big clique, and

any sort of truck with native circles, political or otherwise, is frowned on. 'It is not done,' as the phrase has it. Socially, they themselves ostracise us. I mean the genuine natives, of course, not the semi-westernised lot whom one does meet in clubs and at gymkhanas. But some devilish sort of spook gleamed at me out of those blighters' eyes. You know how one wakes up from sound sleep with every sense on the alert and every nerve quivering, yet, try as you may, you never discover the cause of your alarm. Well, that is the sort of thing which happened to me in broad daylight. It sounds perfectly ridiculous, I know, but I was forced to follow them, so to speak, and, in the same way, when I ran into you again, not even the lightning of *your* frown could have stopped me from addressing you."

Miss Hilton rose. It may be she acknowledged a certain weakening of purpose, because Colquhoun was greatly in earnest, and could pour out his soul with convincing sincerity to a willing listener. But she undoubtedly surprised him. Just as they were reaching a basis of mutual understanding, here was she saying with a studied politeness:

"Well, I am glad you have told me these interesting things, Captain Colquhoun, because it is clear they do not concern me in the least. Goodbye!"

And she was gone, with that swift ease of movement which had disconcerted him once already that morning. Even Cæsar took the cue of aloofness, and trotted away unconcernedly.

This time Colquhoun did not stare after them. He was too hurt. He could not see how any word of his could have given offence. Nor did he care greatly.

"What the devil does it matter?" he growled savagely. "I'll do now what I ought to have done half an hour ago—go straight to the Club and forget the whole bally business."

He was angry and perplexed. His pace was that of a man with a purpose. At Hyde Park Corner he boarded an east-bound omnibus. It did not occur to him that his present path in life did not seem to lie diagonally across the Green Park. Twice had he been balked in the effort to penetrate that oasis and many strange events were destined to happen before he discovered whether such a route even existed.

CHAPTER IV

WHEREIN ARTHUR COLQUHOUN IS ADVERTISED FOR

It was some consolation to win a week's expenses at Bridge. Three times during the afternoon did he hold a hundred aces, twice score a grand slam. His partner, a shrewd old Sapper, backed the youngster's luck, and cheerfully doubled their opponents' bids when a despairing effort was made to break the run.

"You must have had, or are going to have, a rotten bad time with your best girl, Arthur," grumbled the man who paid Colquhoun nearly five pounds when the game ended.

"The lady doesn't exist," said Colquhoun. "I met a nice girl this morning, I admit, and she turned me down flat, but, as I had never spoken to her before and will probably never see her again, the old tag hardly holds good."

"Girls are the limit nowadays. I don't know what's come over them. They'll jolly well take all the good times you offer—the dinners, the theatres, the dances, the whole gamut of expensive amusements, but—my hat!—just slip your arm round one in a taxi an' see what you get!"

"They used up all their military enthusiasm during the War," laughed the Sapper.

"The War! The present generation of flappers knows nothing about the War."

"Who does, anyhow?" put in the fourth man at the table. "I watched a battalion of Guards the other day learning the bayonet exercise. It's enough to make a

cat laugh. As though anything except gas and tanks will matter next time."

"And wireless," commented the first speaker. "There's something queer going on in wireless. Any of you fellows do much listening in?"

The Sapper admitted he used a crystal set nearly every evening.

"And haven't you been conscious of an unexpected blank space once a night or thereabouts—a species of numbing or electrical paralysis, giving a sensation not unlike that caused by compressed air when two fast trains pass in a tunnel?"

"Now that you mention it, I have."

"What did you put it down to?"

"Atmospherics."

"A blessed word, but it won't meet this difficulty. The broadcasting people are worried by it. They believe it represents some secret experiments, which, try as they may, they cannot fathom. They are quite sure the force, or control, is developing in intensity. Though the thing doesn't last longer than a couple of seconds the domination is becoming more pronounced. The leading experts are convinced that somewhere in the British Isles there is an installation which can put every transmitting station out of action completely and for as long as the unknown operators wish."

"I thought that 'death ray' stuff was all my eye and Betty Martin, and this yarn smacks of it," said Colquhoun.

"Every new idea is scoffed at in the beginning, and the unbeliever's attitude is reasonable enough. The thinker who originates it hasn't proper mechanical appliances, and, when these begin to appear, they are often collared for a time by quacks and showmen. If you ask any well-informed citizen when aviation came into existence he would trot out some tosh about Santos Dumont and the Wright Brothers. He would

be astonished and decidedly sceptical when told that a full century before Bleriot flew the Channel a Yorkshire squire named Sir George Cayley designed gliders, described the bi-plane with its struts, and sent his coachman three hundred yards through the air from the top of a hill. Of course, the machine smashed up on landing, and the coachman, rising from the ruins, walked back and gave notice. There's a mute, inglorious Milton for you! We don't even know the hero's name. Like a true Tyke, he hated any newfangled device. . . . Sorry, but I must be off. I've got a date."

The party broke up. Colquhoun, like Sir George Cayley's coachman, didn't realise that he had been given a glimpse of something new and strange—something which would affect his own life almost as profoundly as the crash of a glider at Brompton in Yorkshire affected an unwilling experimenter in 1810. As it happened, he himself was an enthusiast in wireless telegraphy, but his experience was confined to the low-powered installations used on active service. He wanted to hear more about the "interruptions" spoken of by his card-table acquaintance, and meant discussing the matter with him at the first opportunity.

In the Club library he consulted a "Peerage" and "Who's Who," discovering from these sources that Maud, Viscountess Weybourne, was a daughter of Sir Maurice Gleave's aunt on his mother's side, so the two were first cousins. Before her husband, an iron-master, began to rise in the world his name was Brankshome, and this fact brought back to mind the Mrs. Brankshome who figured vaguely in Colquhoun's recollection as his mother's girlhood friend. Lady Weybourne's maiden name was Hilton; a General Hilton, retired, living at Bath, was shown as having a daughter, Evelyn Mary.

"So that's that," mused the searcher. "It seems

fairly evident that Miss Evelyn Mary can hardly fail to have heard or read of Sir Maurice Gleave, and, if she merely mentions my name to her aunt, she will find I am not quite the outsider she treated me as."

However, being almost certain that the young lady in question would not dream of telling Lady Weybourne anything whatsoever about him, he turned to the Gleave family. Here the record was equally definite. The fourteenth baronet had been married twice. His first wife died in childbirth, their offspring being Sir Maurice. The second wife, who came on the scene two years later, was a Kashmiri princess, a somewhat surprising development, and her only son, Francis, was his half-brother's heir. Neither man was married; Greystone House, Norfolk, was given as the address of both, their respective ages being fifty-four and fifty.

A swirl of rain against the nearest window warned Colquhoun that the weather had broken. He remained in the Club, and dined with a melancholy colonel who was full of most startling predictions regarding the end of the world, which, he said, was foretold in Revelations.

"The language of prophecy," he explained, "is cryptic, but precise enough. Unfortunately mankind has been monkeying with the calendar ever since chronology began. So we are driven back to periods, and Revelations tells us that a 'time' is 2,500 years. We are now unquestionably in the last century of the third and last 'time.' We may even be passing through the final decade."

He turned and signalled lugubriously to the head waiter.

"I persuaded my friend," he said, when the man came, "to share with me the Club's specialty, a filet Mignon. Now, I ask you, Jules, is *that* a filet Mignon?" and he tapped a brown, arid-looking morsel of meat with a disapproving knife.

"No, sir, it's over-done," conceded authority at once.

"Over-done! The man who invented the *plat* itself could not convert this piece of Wyoming bull into a filet Mignon."

The *maître* rose to the occasion.

"There's been quite a run on filets tonight, sir," he announced with dignity. "If you gentlemen are not in a hurry let me substitute a *poussin* a-piece. I can vouch for them, at any rate."

"What about it, Colquhoun?" inquired the man who expected at any moment to hear the crash of matter and the fall of worlds.

"I think it's a splendid idea, sir," said Colquhoun.

It certainly was a peculiar fact that an enforced delay of twenty minutes in the middle of the meal should cast a flood of light on the antecedents of one member of the Gleave family. Yet that is precisely what happened. The younger man, dreading a long exposition of some disputed passages in Revelations, tried to switch his companion's thoughts to a more trivial topic.

"During your service at home or in India, did you ever run across Sir Maurice Gleave, or his brother Francis, sir?" he asked.

"Gleave—last of the wicked baronets? Well, I knew his father. I was stationed at Murree when the idiot married a Kashmiri nautch girl who posed as a princess, though, she, poor creature, was probably a more reputable person than Gleave himself. They had a son, born and bred in India, an extraordinary fellow, a youthful prodigy, a veritable genius in scientific things. At sixteen he invented a photographic kite with a telescopic lens, almost the very thing which came to perfection in France about 1917, and, mind you, I am talking of a kid living in Srinagar thirty-four years ago. A year later he rigged windmills on a broad-beamed boat, and thus generated electricity which moved a propeller. I saw the craft myself. It didn't

go very fast, I admit, but go it did. Don't you see? Dispensed with all fuel. It didn't matter tuppence which way the wind blew. A most remarkable boy, Francis—black as your hat—a native rather than a sahib. Luckily, there was an earlier son by Gleave's first marriage with a *pukka* Englishwoman, though, I remember now he in his turn came a cropper some years ago."

"Did Francis Gleave ever make any use of his brains?" put in Colquhoun, anxious to avoid reviving his friend's memories of the tragedy in his own life.

"I don't know. Never heard. From the frontier I went to Burmah, and got little or no news of Kashmir there. Mind you, Gleave didn't err financially in marrying Mumtaz Nahai, as I think the nautch girl was called. She had accumulated a tidy fortune, and was far too shrewd to let a drunken husband fritter it away. The home estates were entailed, so the heir was taken care of. Mr. Gleave died of D.T.'s in Rawalpindi Hospital, I heard. In my time every Indian station had its broken-down representative of some old British family. You'd be surprised by the list of famous names I could reel off. Of course, you saw little of that sort of thing after the war. Fast steamers and the cable have created new conditions, and the Government shunts wasters out of the country."

Colquhoun, walking to his lodgings through muddy streets but under a starlit sky, felt that he had collected some odd scraps of knowledge as to the people whom he had met so strangely during the past few hours. He recalled dimly that Francis Gleave was mixed up in the dispute which led to his father's death and Sir Maurice Gleave's social downfall. The man was present during that fatal quarrel. Probably he had been compelled to give evidence against his half-brother, and therein might lie the genesis of the demand

for police protection he seemed to have made recently. Such speculations, however, though interesting enough, had small concern for a youngster who had to make his way in the world. Seen in retrospect, his few weeks of idleness in London were wasted time. It was almost impossible to choose rightly between the various schemes for earning a livelihood offered by Colonial and Trans-Atlantic agencies. They all looked inviting, but in every instance demanded more capital than he possessed.

One comment in a newspaper article stuck out boldly amid the welter of facts garnered during his search for work. It ran somewhat to the effect that the emigrant with a little money, no matter what country he went to, should avoid the large towns, and hire his muscles and his energy to the farmers or fruit-growers who were always crying out for labour.

"A few hundreds plus two years' local knowledge are worth as many thousands without it," wrote the sage. "You would not dream of setting up in any skilled profession without preliminary training, or, if you did, would soon be pilloried as an impostor. Why should you think that farming does not need skill, of which practical experience always forms so large a part?"

"Sound advice!" reflected Colquhoun. "Why wait? Tomorrow I'll see about my passport, and book a berth in the next steamer for Canada and the Far West. That will be cheaper than the New York route."

It has been seen already that he had the praiseworthy habit of planning beforehand how best to dispose of his time and of mapping out the road by which he would reach an objective. It did not occur to him at all that he and his fortunes were embarked already on a swift-flowing river. Its current was all the more irresistible in that it remained unseen and unfelt. He might, when danger threatened, and he sensed the drag

of a nearing Niagara, play a man's part in the attempt to save himself and others. At the moment he could exercise no more personal volition than a cork swept along by a mountain torrent, and he would be thrice fortunate if the simile held good, because a cork has, at least, the invaluable faculty of bobbing up again no matter how often it may be submerged.

Next morning, after breakfast, he resolved to avoid the Club until he was committed irrevocably to the great adventure. Again he walked through Hyde Park, for the weather held fine though the sky was threatening. Be sure he had an eye for the cross paths in the neighbourhood of Stanhope Gate, but there was neither sight nor sign of a girl in a blue dress or stately Borzoi. He did not forget the rabbits. They, however, must wait. Perhaps he would be free to stroll that way later in the day.

The Passport Office, he knew, was near Queen Anne's Gate, the very place whence he had set out two nights ago to explore the wilds of the Green Park. Now was his opportunity. The clouds, if heavy with rain, did not break, and he might reach the area of cabs again before the downpour came.

At Hyde Park Corner he ran into a one-armed commissionaire from his Club. The man saluted and halted.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, "but p'raps you'd like to know there's a telephone call waitin' for you. It's from Victoria 7000. That's Scotland Yard, sir."

"Scotland Yard! A trifle suspicious, sergeant. Any name?"

"I don't quite remember the name, sir. It sounded foreign-like. I would have heard nothing about it if the hall-porter hadn't axed if Victoria 7000 wasn't the Yard's number."

"Was it Furneaux, or——"

"That's it, sir, right enough. Mr. Furneaux wants you to ring him up."

"Oh, I understand now. I've not been found out this time. Where is the nearest call-office, I wonder?"

The commissionaire took thought.

"Are you a member of the Cavalry Club, sir?" he inquired.

"No."

"Well, the hall-porter there is a pal of mine. If you come with me that far, sir, I'll arrange things."

Thus it befell that Colquhoun once again avoided the Green Park. Within a few minutes he heard the little detective's high-pitched voice over the telephone.

"Ah, Captain Colquhoun!" it squeaked, in its sharp, incisive accents. "Glad you caught me before I went out. Seen the *Times* this morning?"

"No," said Colquhoun.

"All the better. Where are you now? Well, jump on a 'bus and come straight here. You can do it in twenty minutes. You'll save time if you travel by way of Victoria."

"I would never have thought of that," laughed Colquhoun. "But what's up, anyhow?"

"You may hear of something to your advantage, as the advertisements say. I dunno. Let's talk it over. I hate these long-range discussions."

Not being altogether dense, Colquhoun hung up and caught a Victoria 'bus. He was at New Scotland Yard well within the allotted twenty minutes. It was his first visit to the headquarters of the Metropolitan Police, and he found its severity impressive. However, there was no delay. The moment he gave his name he was taken in a lift to the third floor and conducted through an ante-room to a spacious apartment overlooking the Embankment. The threatened storm arrived with him. The windows were streaming with rain. Indeed, the noise of the heavy shower beating against the panes was so great that Colquhoun and his guide were in the room before Furneaux looked up

from a desk where he was consulting a big volume of newspaper cuttings.

Mr. Winter was seated at a central table. He was writing a note, and smoking. He greeted Colquhoun affably.

"Ah, there you are!" he cried. "Any excitement since we parted?"

"No, rather the reverse," laughed the soldier. "I ran into Miss Hilton in the Park, and she turned me down rather badly."

"Miss Hilton?" put in Furneaux, closing the reference book with a bang.

"Yes. The girl with Lady Weybourne, you know."

"I *do* know. The point is—how did *you* know?"

"Firstly, by a process of exhaustion, as logicians put it. I looked through the list of débutantes. But the real triumph came when I met her by accident yesterday morning, and she tackled me straight off."

"What had *you* done?"

"She wanted to find out the name of the man who was cheeky to her aunt."

"Did you tell her?"

"Yes, after refusing at first, and being badly snubbed for my pains."

For once in his life Furneaux was too keen on the scent. Of course, he had a good excuse. The chance turn of Colquhoun's words gave no hint of the actual break in the conversation between the two young people.

"But why should she snub you?" he demanded.

"I cannot guess. She said she was not interested in my story, and she certainly showed no particular interest in me."

"Did that annoy you?"

Colquhoun laughed cheerfully.

"Yes, for some absurd reason it did," he confessed.

"You are not accustomed to being turned down by nice young women?"

"Not exactly. I have not met many. Perhaps that accounts for it. I mean, of course, that I am not well acquainted with their ways."

"Do you mean to say you are twenty-eight and have escaped being engaged?"

"That is the actual fact. And jolly glad I am of it."

"There's an example for you, Charles!" chuckled Winter. "The trouble that shrimp gives me," he went on, turning to Colquhoun, "getting him out of breach of promise cases! He simply cannot resist a fat woman. Heaven alone knows why, but the plumper they are the greater is their appeal. The last one had frizzy golden hair, china blue eyes and three chins. Rather thoughtlessly, I admit, I addressed her by her real name, and she collapsed into the nearest chair on which Furneaux happened to be seated. We didn't see him again for some minutes."

"Alas, poor Marie!" sighed Furneaux. "To think that now she's doing laundry work in Pentonville! But the records of my successes with the sex must be boring to a good young man like you, Captain Colquhoun. . . . So you do not know you are being advertised for in today's *Times*?"

"I?" cried Colquhoun, in genuine astonishment.

Furneaux handed him a slip of paper on which was pasted a newspaper cutting. It read:

"Captain Arthur Colquhoun, D.S.O., late Indian Army, believed now to be in England, is requested to communicate at once with Messrs. Smith, Son & Smith, solicitors, Lincoln's Inn Fields, who will put him in touch with one who wishes to befriend him."

Colquhoun took time to master this communication thoroughly before he raised his eyes.

"Who are these people?" he said. "I have never before even heard of them."

"We expected as much," agreed Furneaux. "That is why we wanted to have a word with you before you see them. Messrs. Smith, Son & Smith are old-established family lawyers, and of the highest respectability. Anybody else would have rung up the service clubs until they got on your track, but their notion of dignified action is to draw up an advertisement and insert it in the *Times*. The point is that they represent Mr. Francis Gleave."

"What on earth can Mr. Francis Gleave want with me?" cried Colquhoun, almost angrily.

"He tells you. He 'wishes to befriend' you."

"I'd sooner——"

Winter held up a large, mildly restraining hand.

"There's a proverb, or something of the sort, about fearing certain persons who come with gifts," he said. "But why should you fear Mr. Francis Gleave? Why not find out what he has in his mind? To put it another way, we, this department, I mean, are particularly anxious now that you should go further into this matter and keep us posted as to developments. Two days ago I advised you to avoid these Gleaves. But the conditions have changed. Today you can help us. We do not ask you to spy on this man, or play up to him, or do anything mean or underhanded. He wants to 'befriend' you, as he puts it, and that desire on his part may or may not imply a visit to his house in Norfolk, where he lives in absolute seclusion. We rather hope things may turn out that way. If so, please accept the invitation. Of course, should you incur any personal expenses they will be paid by us, but that again does not commit you to any sort of detective work. In a word, ascertain what lies behind this advertisement, fall in with Mr. Gleave's intent so far as your personal feelings permit, and let us know what

it's all about. I don't think you will come to any harm. You can trust us to keep an eye on you—a protecting eye, of course."

And the Chief, passing over a box of Havanas, laughed at his own slip.

CHAPTER V

GREYSTONES

So it happened that instead of visiting the Passport Office, buying a steamship ticket, and going to see the rabbits in Hyde Park, Colquhoun was whirled around London in a taxi that morning, and ultimately found himself in an afternoon train bound for Norwich.

Messrs. Smith, Son & Smith seemed to be such a venerable law firm that neither Smith nor Son was left in the establishment. Colquhoun was received by a Mr. Johnstone, a thin, cadaverous man with wrinkled skin bleached to the tint of parchment. The caller was encouraged, gently but firmly, to give particulars of his life and parentage, which Mr. Johnstone quite openly ticked off on a document produced from a black japanned box marked: "Francis Gleave, Esq."

When the lawyer spoke he said little.

"I am instructed to hand you fifty pounds for your expenses, and as a guarantee of good faith," he said. "Will you find it convenient to travel to Norfolk to-day?"

Colquhoun was hardly prepared for such brevity combined with such Napoleonic directness.

"Yes, but—" he began.

Mr. Johnstone waved aside the imminent request for an explanation.

"I know no more than you why my client wishes to see you," he said. "He is a man of means, and lives in strict retirement. He asked us to find you, and send you at once to the 'Fisherman's Rest,' in the village of Keynham, on the Wash, where you will receive a letter

from him arranging a meeting. We are to wire him saying by what train you leave London. That, plus the financial detail, is the sum of our instructions. We—er—hope the journey may prove advantageous to you personally. If the firm can be of any service, pray command us."

That was all. Mr. Johnstone handed over ten five-pound notes, consulted a railway time-table, ascertained that the 3.10 p.m. from Liverpool-street would give Colquhoun ample time to pack a bag, and then showed by an almost opaque glaze over already glassy eyes that the interview was ended.

Of course, Colquhoun telephoned Victoria 7000. Neither Winter nor Furneaux was in the "Yard," but a pleasant voice assured him that it was "all right"—they would receive his message.

He bought a *Times* at Liverpool-street, just to make sure he was not dreaming. It was a novel sensation to see himself placarded among the varied appeals of the "Personal" columns. He wondered whether Miss Hilton would notice it, and Lady Weybourne, and Sir Maurice Gleave. The last name induced thought. The baronet must be aware that Smith, Son & Smith represented his half-brother. Would he be startled when he read that "Arthur Colquhoun" was in request at Greystones? Had he realised by this time that the youngster from whom he was parted so abruptly by the minions of the law was the son of the man he had killed?

However, Colquhoun did not bother his brains greatly over problems he could not solve. The only thing that troubled him was the proper disposal of the sum advanced for his present journey. He resolved to keep a rigid account of expenditures, but saw no reason why he should economise, so purchased a first-class return ticket. The booking-office clerk did not know where Keynham was, but advised inquiry at Norwich.

In that ancient city Colquhoun was told that a local train would take him to a station within two miles of the village, whence a railway omnibus connected with it and other isolated hamlets. After a tedious journey he was deposited at the door of a comfortable-looking inn.

Evidently, he was expected.

An elderly man, of portly presence, a bland fellow who did not seem, somehow, to fit into the picture, came forward at once.

"Captain Colquhoun?" he inquired deferentially.

"Yes."

"I am ordered to await your arrival, sir. My name is Hick. I am Mr. Gleave's butler."

"And an excellent name for a butler, too," said Colquhoun.

Mr. Hick might have been a trifle disconcerted by this reply, but his manner did not show it.

"You will be made quite comfortable here, sir," he went on. "As you may not have dined I have taken the liberty to order a roast chicken. I brought some wine from Greystones; Mr. Gleave keeps a fine cellar. . . . This way, sir. You will have the coffee-room to yourself this evening. A fishing party of five left today. . . . This is the landlord, Mr. Knyvitt. He will show you to your room. Here is a letter from Mr. Gleave. When you have read it, sir, perhaps you will give me a note. There is no hurry at all. I am entirely at your service."

"You have certainly succeeded in making me feel at home, Mr. Hick," said Colquhoun. "The combination of roast chicken and good wine sounds irresistible."

Mr. Knyvitt, a trim, horsey-looking individual, ushered Colquhoun upstairs to a front room.

"The sheets are O.K., sir," he said, patting a fold of spotless linen. "My missus sees to that herself. No damp bed for anybody in this house. Dinner will be

ready in fifteen minutes. Sorry we have only lamps, but Keynham is a long way from everywhere."

Colquhoun opened his letter. It was written in a scholarly hand, and was dated not only with the day of the month but with the hour, 5 p.m. It ran:

Dear Sir—I am glad my solicitors found you so promptly. My butler will see to your reception. Unfortunately, my indifferent health, no less than my habit of working after a light meal about seven o'clock, prevents me from seeing you tonight. Nor can I entertain you here, for reasons which I hope to give when we meet. Can you arrange to call at Greystones tomorrow at 10 a.m.? It is only half a mile from the inn, so you may prefer to walk. If the weather is unfavourable I shall send a car at 9.45. Will you kindly write a line saying if this arrangement is agreeable?

May I add that I am an old friend of your father's? I did not know your mother so well, and I think I saw you only once, at a distance, when you, with your parents, were watching the regatta at Cowes in 1913. I am,

Yours sincerely,

FRANCIS GLEAVE.

An eminently friendly and well-expressed message, thought Colquhoun. He read it a second time with the careful deliberation one gives to the written word behind which may lurk some hidden meaning. But it was impossible to extract any significance other than that conveyed quite openly by each phrase.

There appeared to be no writing materials in the room, so he went downstairs. Mr. Hick awaited him in the passage, and at once showed him a well-lighted smoking-room.

"You'll find paper and envelopes in here, sir," he said.

Colquhoun sat at a table, and wrote:

Dear Sir—At the moment I have little to say, except that you seem to be well served by those whom you employ.

Messrs. Smith, Son, and Smith were most business-like, and your butler, Mr. Hick, has begun nobly. Half a mile in the rain tomorrow would not trouble me at all, but, as you have so hospitably offered a car, I shall await it at 9.45 should the weather be bad. I think——

He was about to inform Mr. Francis Gleave that he felt he ought to state he had met his brother, Sir Maurice, in London, two days ago wholly by accident. Taking thought, however, he decided that such frankness was uncalled for, and might possibly tend to defeat whatever purpose the Scotland Yard men had in wishing him to keep this mysterious appointment. So he changed the purport of the sentence to a hopeful view of the British climate for the following day.

He believed that Mr. Hick eyed him closely while he was composing this brief reply, so he looked at the man fairly and squarely before handing over the sealed and addressed envelope. Indeed, he turned so quickly that he surprised the close scrutiny to which he was being subjected.

"I am sorry to hear Mr. Gleave is an invalid," he said.

Apparently the butler was not prepared for any such comment by his master's guest.

"Well, sir," he answered, evidently trying hard to find non-committal words, "not quite so much an invalid as a gentleman who is careful about his diet, and —er—keeps irregular hours. That is to say, sir, not exactly irregular, but unusual, shall I put it? However, sir, I have no doubt Mr. Gleave himself will tell you all about that. Is there anything else I can do for you, sir?"

"No, thanks. Here's your note. Goodnight, Mr. Hick."

"Goodnight, sir."

The man made off rather hurriedly. It was obvious

he wanted to undergo no further questioning. His air was flurried. Possibly he was aware that this pleasant-mannered youngster was shrewd enough to guess at the way in which he had been summed up for subsequent report.

Colquhoun himself was vastly surprised by the quality of the wines provided for his use. There were two bottles of a famous champagne in its best year, two of Château Yquem and two of Chambertin, both vintages dating back a quarter of a century.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed when Mr. Knyvitt paraded this array for inspection, "how long am I supposed to stay here?"

"As long as you like, Captin," beamed the landlord. "With that sort of stuff on the side, backed up by my missus's cookin', I'd be in no hurry to catch a train, if I was you. I've got some decent wines on my list, but nothink of that class. Even if I had it people wouldn't pay the price."

The landlord, however, lost his geniality when Colquhoun entered the bar-parlour after eating an excellent meal and tried to gather some local impressions of Greystones and its present occupant. There were others present—the Keynham butcher, a couple of farmers, and the owner of several boats used for deep-sea fishing. Colquhoun found them communicative enough in regard to village activities during the "season," and all were ready to take a drink with him, but there was an uneasy silence when he asked what manner of man his prospective host of the morrow night be.

He sensed a general disinclination to speak, but put it down to bucolic unwillingness to take a lead in discussing any important member of the community with a complete stranger.

"I don't want to know the worst about Mr. Gleave," he vowed. "I have never in my life seen him, but have been invited to meet him tomorrow. What sort

of chap is he? Does he take any part in public affairs? Is he a magistrate, or a county councillor? Does he breed Norfolk trotters, or prize poultry, or spaniels? Does he hunt, shoot, fish or preside over political meetings?"

The boat-owner, scenting a possible customer, endeavoured to answer.

"Us folks hereabouts don't know much about Mr. Francis Gleave, an' that's a fact," he said.

"But he has resided among you for some years?" went on Colquhoun, determined to break the ice, if possible.

"Oh, ay." Thus his unwilling informant.

"Best part o' twenty year, off an' on," put in the butcher.

"My land marches with his for a good half mile, an' I've never clapped eyes on him, though I've bin in this parish since 1910, an' am his neighbour since 1914," said one of the farmers.

"He is by way of being a recluse, then?" commented Colquhoun.

"Ay, maister, he's all that."

"It's this way," explained the other farmer. "He leaves us alone an' us leaves him alone, an' that's as much as anyone can say."

"Do any of you know his brother, or half-brother, Sir Maurice Gleave?"

This time the silence was profound. It became irksome. The landlord struck a match and lighted his pipe. After a puff or two he gained courage.

"There's not a man here who didn't know an' like Sir Maurice," he said slowly. "He was one of the best, a nice open-handed gentleman. But—there you are! He got into trouble, just afore the War, an' that was the end o' him."

Naturally, it did not occur to Colquhoun that these Norfolk villagers had failed to connect his name with

that of the man for whose death the baronet was tried and found guilty. Mr. Hick had pronounced it correctly, with two syllables, whereas every person in the room recalled a name of three syllables, with the letter "I" in it, too, and this newcomer had not yet signed the hotel register.

Of course, the soldier was puzzled, but he felt it would be unfair to press his inquiries farther.

"All right!" he laughed. "I shall meet Mr. Francis Gleave tomorrow, so, if you gentlemen are here in the evening, and I do not happen to leave Keynham as promptly as I came to it, I may be able to give you quite a lot of information."

"Well, drink up, sir, an' have another," said the renter of boats. "I hope you won't be goin' quite so soon. The mackerel are overdue, an' there's no place to equal the Wash when the shoals come in. I took some gentlemen out this time last year—party of four they were, an' none too quick on the troll, any of 'em —yet each rod hauled in a hundred fish in three hours. They did, an' all."

"There's no fish like a mackerel for manure," said one of the farmers—a cryptic remark, but it brought the talk well away from Greystones and its inmate.

Mr. Knyvitt dropped a hint after closing-time, while giving his guest a candle.

"Keynham folk an' Mr. Gleave don't mix any better'n oil an' water," he said darkly. "He ain't one of us, sir, an' we knows it, an' 'e knows it, so what more need one say?"

"What, indeed?" agreed Colquhoun, who remembered then the Kashmir colonel's description of Mumtaz Nahai's son.

The next morning was fine; he rose early and took a stroll before breakfast. The village consisted of a straggling street close to the shore, with two short lanes leading respectively to a substantial stone pier

and a smaller wooden jetty. The land thereabouts was level, undulating to the higher ground a mile or so south. On the east, however, a curiously shaped hump rose sharply from the sea, to run inland down a long southerly slope. Just beneath its loftiest point stood a large house, stone-built, with steeply-pitched roofs and eaves projecting rather markedly.

From its north-east windows there must be a far-flung view of the Wash and the North Sea, but its spacious reception-rooms were turned to the more hospitable aspect secured for lawns and gardens. Indeed, the great mass of the building served to protect flowers and shrubs from the polar winds and from an even more potent enemy, sea-spray. At first sight the house looked comfortable enough. Its sombre heaviness was relieved by a wealth of summer greenery, and it was remarkably open to observation, though this feature was more apparent than real, because a high wall, broken by a lodge on the road-side, shut off near approach save by the appointed way. The enclosure formed a rectangle of several acres.

There was no other house of the mansion type in the neighbourhood, but Colquhoun, finding one of his farmer acquaintances leading a horse through a gate, said, as a matter of form:

"That is Greystones, I suppose?"

The man nodded, and glanced to left and right. He did not mean to be uncivil, however.

"A queer place to build a house," he said, "but they do say as how it was put there for a purpose when brandy was scarce an' silks were dear in Boney's time. There's a cleft in the rock on the seaward side, a reg'lar deep-water dock except at dead low-water spring tides. Mr. Gleave keeps a tidy-sized 'lectric launch there now, an' goes out in her offen. He's got wireless, too, though he had to give up both durin' the War. . . . Didn't you say, sir, you'd never seen him?"

"Yes. That's right."

"Happen, then, you don't know he's not quite English?"

"As a matter of fact a friend in London warned me that his mother was a Kashmiri."

The farmer laughed.

"Ay, they tell me there's no doubt whatsumever about his mother," he chuckled, and made off.

The inference was obvious, but Colquhoun turned a deaf ear to it. In India he had seen a family of sons and daughters of exactly the same racial strain as Mr. Gleave, wherein the sons were fair-skinned and brown-haired and the girls thoroughly Oriental. Indeed, if the squire of Greystones resembled his mother rather than his father he obeyed one of the accepted laws of heredity, a law set at defiance by the family Colquhoun had in mind.

A most appetising meal placed him at peace with life and its problems. He resolved to wait on Mr. Gleave with an open mind. Preconceived notions were stupid, at the best. It might be sheerly impossible that he should receive favours at the hand of any person bearing that ill-omened name, but mere common sense demanded that he should not behave like a suspicious churl during the forthcoming meeting.

Lighting his pipe at the inn door at a quarter to ten, Colquhoun set off. At a little distance down the road a policeman was standing. The man looked at him closely, so Colquhoun bade him "Good morning!"

The constable saluted.

"Captain Colquhoun?" he inquired.

"Yes," and Colquhoun halted.

The other turned and pointed to Greystones.

"That's the place, sir," he said. "You'll find the lodge up the road on the left. Of course, you didn't ask me anything about it, but one never knows what eyes may be peepin', or ears listenin'," and his voice

dropped. "What I really want to say is that my superintendent 'phoned an hour ago that I was to help you in any way possible. If I'd heard of you last night we could ha' met an' had a talk. Anyhow, I'll be at home tonight at half past eight. My house is opposite the post-office. Don't wait about, but walk straight in."

Colquhoun was surprised by these precautions.

"Can't you come with me now along the road?" he said.

"Better not, sir. *You'll* be all right, I'm sure, and we'll be able to talk all the more freely this evening."

He saluted again, and made for the village at the majestic pace which policemen alone, of all human beings, possess the secret of. Colquhoun could not help smiling.

"If the year wasn't 1924 and the coast that of Norfolk I might think I was in for trouble—imprisonment and some form of Chinese torture," he mused. "But I pin my faith to the utter respectability of Smith, Son, and Smith, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, while those Scotland Yard johnnies would never have sent me—By Jove, that's it! The local superintendent heard from them this morning. I'm under police protection! What's it all about, I wonder?"

The aspect of Greystones as seen through a pair of massive and beautiful wrought-iron gates was highly reassuring, however. Double lines of magnificent rhododendrons, flanked by copper beeches and chestnut-trees, marked the upward curve of the drive. On the left were extensive glass-houses, an orchard, and vegetable garden; on the right a park-like lawn. The place was exceedingly well kept. It demanded and evidently received the constant care of a dozen gardeners.

Colquhoun was admitted through a wicket, which, he noticed, had to be unlocked, by a perfectly orthodox

lodge-keeper, a navy pensioner as it proved, and was directed to either follow the carriage-way or take a path through the rosery when the road turned to the right.

He elected for the longer route, believing he would thus obtain a clearer view of the house. He was right in that respect, but was by no means prepared for what he did see. He had just passed the path spoken of by the man at the gate when a girl's head and shoulders were thrust above a clump of syringas. She seemed to have been standing, waiting, perhaps, in a rose-covered pergola, and was a trifle ill at ease at being spotted so promptly, though, indeed, Colquhoun's eyes and ears were very much on the alert at that moment, and would hardly have missed the unusual movement of a twig on either hand.

"Uncle is expecting you," she said, with a nervous catch of laughter in her voice. "Don't tell him you saw me. We are to be introduced later."

Colquhoun managed to get his hat off, but she had vanished before he could speak. He stood, thinking he would have more than one glimpse of her as she hurried along the pergola. But she did not go that way. All he knew was that he had seen an extraordinarily beautiful face, un-English, Madonna-like, and had heard a soft, rich voice speaking most musically. The girl's eyes were large and dark, her lips red, her skin cream-white, with a touch of russet on her cheeks. She wore a white blouse of some soft material, and, he believed, a white flannel skirt. Around her shoulders was draped loosely an orange silk scarf, an admirable foil for her shining black hair.

She was not of his own race—of that he was certain—nor yet was she Indian of any type he was acquainted with, though clothes go far to make the woman. It was an odd moment to think of Miss Evelyn Mary Hilton, but think of her he did, mainly by force of contrast,

and the queer notion came that if those two girls could be drawn on the same canvas by some master of the painter's craft the result would be a picture such as he, at least, had never seen.

But now he was passing the heavily-curtained windows of a large room, and a smiling butler was awaiting him at the nearest door of a glass porch of the conservatory order which screened the actual entrance.

"Good morning, sir!" said Mr. Hick, with the correct note of affable respect. "Mr. Gleave directed me to bring you to the library. He is there now, as it is the best lighted room in the house at this hour."

Colquhoun crossed a lofty hall. Even the most hurried glance showed the perfect taste of the old oak furniture, wainscotting, and Oriental rugs. A carved oak staircase of fine proportions led by two broad flights to the upper floors. Suits of armour stood in the corners. But the place was not overcrowded. It was, as the connoisseur often expresses his tribute to artistic restraint, "just right."

A door was thrown open, and his name announced. He passed on. His pulse had quickened unaccountably. He was almost nervous. He felt that he was on the threshold of new and strange experiences, and the very indefiniteness of this belief was its most disagreeable factor.

CHAPTER VI

MISS MARITA PEREIRA SPEAKS OUT

COLQUHOUN'S first impression of Francis Gleave was of an ascetic, a dreamer, a man apart from his fellows. A frail, almost emaciated figure rose slowly but without effort from the depths of a comfortable chair placed near the more distant pair of windows (there were four, two facing east and two south), and came forward noiselessly to meet him. He remembered afterwards that his host's footsteps caused no sound. Of course, any other person could have moved across the thick, soft, velvet-pile carpet in the same way. But Gleave looked rather ghost-like; this silent progress seemed to be a part of his strange personality.

The bizarre notion that he was not of this earth was dissipated the moment he spoke. His dark-skinned and deeply lined features lit up with a most attractive smile, and his voice was surprisingly mellow and strong.

"I am delighted to welcome you, Arthur Colquhoun," he said. "I would know you anywhere. You are the living embodiment of your worthy father. Do you care to shake hands with one bearing my name?"

The younger man felt that his citadel was being stormed without delay, yet, so strong is convention, he yielded.

"I see no reason, Mr. Gleave, why we should not meet in amity," he answered.

He had not expected to make any such declaration thus promptly, if at all, but here was he clasping hands

already with a brother of the man whom he had learnt to regard with loathing!

There is, perhaps, no more misleading physical characteristic than the grip which inaugurates or cements acquaintanceship. Your thorough-paced scoundrel may clutch you as in a vice, while the average archbishop, or other quite trustworthy person, is just as likely to tender the tips of fingers and thumb in a rather listless and discouraging way. Mr. Francis Gleave achieved the happy mean. His handshake was firm and pleasant. Most certainly it was not that of a weakling. Athletic training teaches some things quite definitely, and Colquhoun was sure that those long, nervous fingers could exert a steel-like tenacity if need be.

It was disconcerting to have the eleven years' old tragedy brought to life without the least preamble, but, in all likelihood, the unhappy business was in the older man's mind, and he had resolved not to shirk it. At any rate, he contrived to ignore it now with equal readiness, and was sufficiently at ease that he could pass instantly to a topic of the hour.

"Are you comfortable at the inn?" he inquired, after motioning his visitor to a chair. "My domestic expert, Mr. Hick, tells me the place is well managed. I am compelled to leave all such details to him. I am not, as I may look, and as many people assume, an invalid, but my habits run so contrary to accepted standards in regard to food and the daily portioning of my time that it would be merely absurd if I attempted to entertain here. I could never eat with my guests, and they would hardly ever see me."

He smiled so agreeably that Colquhoun recovered his poise.

"I have been in houses where self-effacement of that sort on the part of the host would have been quite admirable," he said.

"In my earlier years I found that such houses abounded," came the ready retort. "But I don't want you to regard me as a crank, young man. For instance, won't you smoke? I believe my cupboards will produce the best of cigars and cigarettes. Or do you prefer your pipe? You were smoking one as you came from the village. . . . Oh, yes. I had a good look at you through a telescope. Long before you passed the lodge gate I knew that my lawyers had hit on the Arthur Colquhoun I wanted."

The soldier admitted that a pipe was his favourite. He imagined that Mr. Gleave would open up forthwith on the motive behind his search for the son of an old-time friend, or acquaintance—Colquhoun was not sure in which category to place him—but again the other evaded the point.

"You are a stranger in this part of the world, I take it?" he went on.

"Yes. Indeed, I hardly recognise my own country. I served several years in India, and have only just returned home."

"So I was given to understand. Let me explain that remark. I have not been making impertinent inquiries. I simply wrote to the War Office for news of you, and, after a delay of nearly three weeks, was told you had given up your commission recently. How immovable are British institutions! How imperturbable! Any ordinary business firm would have answered by return of post. I would have preferred that this meeting should have occurred earlier. But, here you are, and that is well!"

He hesitated, as though searching for the next sentence. Colquhoun said to himself: "Now we are coming to it!" He tried to help by a comment on the equally old-fashioned methods of family lawyers.

"Messrs. Smith, Son, and Smith could have found me a day sooner by the simple expedient of telephoning

the service clubs, making allowance for the fact that a junior officer would hardly belong to the more expensive ones," he put in.

"Those excellent people have handled my affairs for thirty years," smiled Mr. Gleave. "I am convinced that if London were destroyed by an enemy—a not impossible achievement during the next war—the Messrs. Smith would send me a press-copied letter from the ruins saying that certain debenture stocks of mine were now valueless, and asking for instructions."

Colquhoun relighted his pipe, which, after the manner of pipes, required a second match. He decided to say nothing, as his tactful comments did not seem to meet with success.

"It is interesting to hear that you spent some time in India," went on the deep, resonant voice. "You were attached to the Punjab Frontier Force. Did you visit Kashmir?"

"No, sir. A brother subaltern and I started off from Murree once on a bear-shooting trip in the nullahs, but we were caught by a telegram at a little place called Uri in the Jhelum Valley, and had to return. The usual Zakka Khel foray, you know."

"Ah! Uri! A collection of wretched hovels. I remember it well. You see, I was born and spent my childhood in Srinagar. My mother was a Kashmiri lady, and I am proud of it. Whatever brains I possess I owe to her—to that wonderful East. You, being a soldier, would see or hear hardly anything of the intellectual life of India—native India, I mean?"

"Well, I suppose not," said Colquhoun reflectively. "Such a thing may exist——"

"May exist! Do you doubt it?" and Mr. Gleave's brown eyes glowed with a fiery animation.

"I put that awkwardly, perhaps. But I meant to qualify my words by saying that the only instances of native brain-power I came across were either political

froth or a low sort of cunning. Sorry, if that displeases you, but it is my deliberate opinion. Of course, I may have lacked opportunities of discovering the higher intellectuality you evidently have in mind."

One of those delicate hands veiled Mr. Gleave's face, as though he were in pain. Colquhoun was well aware that he had expressed himself with an almost brutal candour, but he was growing restive. It was not, he felt, to test his slight knowledge of Indian mentality that he had been advertised for and brought to Keynham. Why, then, this studied pretence—this deliberate avoidance of the real issue, whatever it might be?

"Surely you have read somewhere of the debt which we moderns owe to the Wise Men from the East?" questioned the older man after a pause, and his moderate tone made his hearer almost ashamed of that petulant outburst. "They, at least, had a veritable existence, according to the Jewish chroniclers of two thousand years ago—we even know their names, Caspard, Melchior, Balthazar—and there is no branch of our sciences or arts which did not spring from the same source. Why should the rational faculty which has evolved them be simply transferred to people who were savages when the Chinese and Indians were thinkers? The sane brain does not die. It progresses and develops throughout the ages. Each generation starts anew from a broader foundation. Pardon the trite phrase, but isn't it absurd to assume that the nations which gave us the very key to knowledge in the written word, in astronomy, in chemistry, even in that much-abused theory of emotional impulse, psychology, should all at once lapse into barbarism and leave all idealistic development to Europeans? It is not reasonable, Arthur Colquhoun, and, moreover, it is not true. But, may I ask, does this sort of discussion interest you?"

Colquhoun smiled. The commonplace question re-

lieved the tension. He had forgotten for the moment that this man was an inventor, and every inventor thinks he is endowed with brains above the average.

"It interests me immensely," he said. "My only regret is that I am so ill equipped for argument. Even in the army, sir, some of us discuss matters outside the regiment or the latest scandal. As a matter of fact, I went to India prepared to see marvels, but found none. Mohammedanism is frankly materialistic, so let us rule that out. Among the Hindus, however, I looked for examples of at least two things in which the East claims pre-eminence—certain forms of magic, or what we term conjuring, and that physical detachment from ordinary life which leads to an extreme spirituality. I found neither. The most famous feats of conjurers, such as the throwing of a rope in the air and a man climbing up it out of sight, proved to be travellers' tales of the Baron Munchausen order, and the so-called *yogis,* or mystics, were sheer humbugs, as any district official or experienced officer of police can demonstrate beyond dispute."

Mr. Gleave sprang up with a notable alertness.

"Exactly," he said, smiling most pleasantly. "There speaks John Bull. How could one doubt that England would conquer and rule India? Does not a bluebottle fly traverse and disrupt a spider's web, though the delicate fabric he destroys is one of the most wonderful feats of weaving and engineering which nature can show us? But this is dry talk for a delightful summer's day. I must rest a while before luncheon, which, as a rare relaxation, I hope to share with you in so far as the fruit on the table is concerned. By the way, I pride myself on my fruit. You will find nothing in London to equal it. Meanwhile, you may like to look round this house and its grounds. They will repay inspection. And I shall give you a charming guide. I want you to meet my ward, Miss Marita Pereira, daughter of a

Portuguese gentleman of good family who became a tea-planter in Assam and married an Englishwoman out there. Some other time I shall tell you how an old fossil of a bachelor like me came to assume such a charge."

Colquhoun had not seen the other touch any bell, or signal in any way, but a tall young footman appeared as though he had been summoned.

"Where is Miss Pereira?" said his employer.

"In the drawing-room, sir."

"Ah. Come with me, Captain Colquhoun. I do not apologise for leaving you. Almost every day, at this hour, I am asleep, as I read and work at outrageous times, generally till four or five in the morning. I broke my routine today for your sake, because I wanted you to enjoy your visit. Of course, you are anxious to know why I have sent for you. Well, I have an absurd prejudice in favour of better acquaintance before we deal with serious matters—serious, that is, from my point of view rather than yours, for my life lies behind me while yours is in front. Not even the wizards of the West have taught mankind how to avoid old age."

"But you are not old, sir," Colquhoun contrived to say as they were crossing the hall.

"I fear I am," said Gleave, and he might be communing aloud, so subdued was his tone. "I try not to delude myself. We neurotics consume the eichor in our veins at a rate you sturdy Saxons cannot imagine. But, here we are!" and he threw open a door, the footman having disappeared.

"Rita, my dear!" he went on, "let me introduce Captain Arthur Colquhoun, son of an old friend, a man as dear to me as your father was."

The girl Colquhoun had seen in the garden turned from a window where she was trimming the dead leaves off some plants in hanging boxes. She was of middle

height, and exceedingly graceful. She walked with a slightly accentuated sway of the hips such as Spanish dancers affect, but her rhythmic movement was obviously unstudied: in all else she was exactly the well-bred and correctly attired young woman one might expect to find in a palatial environment.

"So you really are here, Captain Colquhoun," she cried cheerfully. "I'm afraid I hardly credited uncle's statement that we were to have a visitor to-day. It's quite an event. Don't feel flattered, though. We so seldom see anyone at Greystones."

Mr. Gleave positively beamed on both Colquhoun and his ward.

"At nineteen a woman can say that sort of thing," he chuckled. "At twenty-nine she dare not."

"Don't stop, uncle," said Marita. "What about thirty-nine?"

"Ah," he murmured, "at thirty-nine she would not even have the chance of expressing her views. . . . But I'll leave Captain Colquhoun in your quite capable hands. Show him our domain. Luncheon will be served at one, I believe."

"What are you interested in?" demanded the girl, when her guardian had gone out. "I hope it isn't furniture or tapestries. I know a bit about the pictures, even if they are mostly futurist or grotesque Chinese."

Colquhoun had seen for himself that the house was a museum of esoteric art. The entrance hall was perfect, the library a mass of blended colour such as well-bound books alone can give, but there was not a picture nor piece of woven stuff on the walls which appealed to his sense of beauty. Nothing was tawdry, however, nor out of tone with its surroundings. If the paintings were bizarre they were gorgeous in colour effects.

"I admit a real liking for the shrubberies and gardens," he said. "Greystones must be a show place for this part of Norfolk."

"It isn't," laughed the girl. "Not even the village postman dare show his nose at the door. Later in the summer people in char-à-bancs stop at the gate and get a peep, but are allowed no more. I'm so glad you want to go out. It's a shame to remain indoors on a day like this."

She took him through the main entrance again, and they skirted the house, making for the seaward side of the grounds.

They spoke of trivial things until they stood together on the highest part of a cliff split by a precipitous gorge. Nearly three hundred feet beneath lay a smart yacht, which Colquhoun guessed with fair accuracy at about 300 tons. The vessel was tied to a wharf, and seemed to be ready for use if required. Two stout breakwaters marked the entrance to this tiny harbour, that on the east being the longer, with a protecting inward curve at its extremity to shut off heavy seas from the only possible quarter whence danger threatened. The land fell away to a rather low level on both sides. North-west, across the shimmering surface of the sunlit sea, a greenish blue blur revealed the coast of Lincolnshire. Colquhoun saw now that Keynham lay on the most northerly tip of Norfolk. The shore line of the Wash began its southerly sweep within a mile of the village.

From the house a broad path, screened by dwarf firs, led down to the landing-place. A snatch of song came from a sailor polishing brass-work on the yacht's deck. A head popped up through a hatch, and a gruff order silenced the vocalist.

"Too bad!" cried Miss Pereira vexedly.

"It was rather awful," agreed Colquhoun, purposely misunderstanding her. "Sailormen are popularly supposed to dance hornpipes and sing lively choruses. They don't. They wail the most frightful tosh about 'mother' or 'the girl that broke my heart.' The chap

who wrote 'The Anchor's Weighed' knew what he was about, I assure you."

"Are you by way of being a cynic?" inquired the girl.

"No. I'm simply trying to be accurate."

"Let me test you. What impressions have you formed of Greystones and its owner?"

Colquhoun turned and looked at his companion, in whose voice there was a sudden note of sadness. Her face was in profile, however, and almost hidden under a broad-brimmed straw hat. Behind her he caught a glimpse of the upper stories of the house, each window suggesting a watchful eye. A small aerial line for wireless slung from the roof looked rather like some fixture for a child's toy.

"Greystones is beautiful, but it conveys a suggestion of sleepiness," he said. "In some respects it is un-English. It is perched on a queer site, too. One could understand a feudal castle being stuck here, but not a Georgian mansion, unless, indeed, it was used for smuggling."

"Oh, it was!" came the eager interruption. "I found two of the out-door caves, or rock-cellars they are really, when the briars lost their leaves last winter. I go there often, and will show them to you this morning, if you like."

"That sounds most attractive."

"But, before we climb down—they lie deep in the ravine—almost at sea-level—tell me why you used that word 'un-English.' It seems to mean such a lot."

"Not in this case," smiled Colquhoun. "Usually, it smacks of priggishness—of a smug conviction that when the rest of the world was made, a little extra attention was given to the fashioning of Great Britain——"

"Don't you believe that yourself?"

"Of course, I do. My hat! Don't I look—" he

was about to add, "an out-and-out Briton," but happily bethought himself, and managed to substitute—"just the sort of self-satisfied idiot whom Tommy warbles about during a canteen concert in India? I recall a verse of the right order——"

And he quoted:

For, don't yer see, the folks at 'ome 'ave never 'eard of Mhow,
They don't know Rawalpindi from Lahore.
They can't begin to understand why slaughterin' a cow
Should myke men kill each other by the score.
They don't know wot a jungle is, cantonment or *maidan,*
They couldn't tell a *kathi* from a *bail,*
They think the Lord 'as put the best of all creation's plan
Within the cliffs of Britain's little isle.

"Who wrote that?" came the inevitable question.

"Some poor blighter who could thrum a banjo thirty or forty years ago, I suppose. India either forgets or remembers. She has no half measures. By Jove, you ought to see an up-country cemetery—where our own people are buried, I mean. It's one of the most depressing sights imaginable. The neglect! The utter oblivion!"

"Yes. I know. I have been in more than one. I did not leave India until after the War. But I shan't let you wriggle away from Greystones."

"Well, then, there's the atmosphere—something remote, brooding—not exactly mysterious but puzzling. For instance, the windows."

"Ah! What of them?" and Miss Rita looked him squarely in the eyes then.

"The framework is of steel, and the panes of glass curiously small—for a big house of the kind, I mean. They have no sashes, but the ventilation is perfect, because individual panes can be opened at any angle and in any position."

"So you noticed that? Anything else?"

"The front door is of solid steel, and slides into place. Every window I have seen has folding steel shutters. Within less than a minute a few trained men could convert Greystones from a gentleman's residence into a fairly strong fort, while its very openness to outward inspection gives what soldiers call 'an uninterrupted zone of fire.' In other words, unless heavily shelled, it could be held by a platoon against a whole battalion."

"Perhaps that is intentional. The Gleave family—the real Norfolk branch—was rather poor before the War, and the then owner leased the property to a German shipping magnate, who made a lot of alterations. He pretended to be terrified of burglars, so had all the old windows taken out and the entrances reconstructed. Of course, the authorities soon removed him in 1914, but my uncle, who bought the place after some sort of a sale, was glad to retain these defences. It was sharp of you to spot them so quickly. . . . But don't stop, please. What next?"

Colquhoun believed he could fill in some of the gaps in this brief summary of the house's recent history. He knew nothing for certain, of course. Only by inference could he guess that Sir Maurice Gleave's lack of means accounted for the German occupation of his ancestral home as well as the financial crash which led to the tragedy in the bank. He was, however, strangely unwilling to permit this outspoken and impulsive girl to blurt out more confidences as to Mr. Francis Gleave. He detested underhanded dealings of any sort. Mr. Gleave must explain his own reasons for seeking the acquaintance of one who had no real connection with him or his affairs in the past.

So he said quietly:

"There is no 'next.' I am so completely taken with Greystones that I want to see more of it. What about

those caves you spoke of? By the way, are we supposed to go there?"

"Now, why do you say that?"

He knew at once that he had startled his companion, but he was beginning to resent the way in which both guardian and ward seemed to be on the *qui vive* for something hidden, some hint of doubt or suspicion, in his lightest word.

"I really cannot tell why I am saying anything," he exclaimed, making no effort to conceal his irritation. "Caves, by their nature, are secret places. You yourself spoke of the difficulty of discovering these two. At least, I gathered as much. Forgive me if I am mistaken. But I really must make it clear that I am here at Mr. Gleave's request, that I do not know why he wishes to meet me, and that I certainly do not intend to pry or peer into matters which he may consider as entirely personal and private."

"Indeed!" said the girl.

He could hardly fail to detect the wave of colour which suffused her face and neck, but her eyes were averted, as she was gazing at the horizon, being apparently interested in a smudge of smoke away to the north-east which betokened the presence thereabouts of some dirty little collier coming down the coast with coal from the Tyne.

"Look here!" he cried penitently, after some seconds of a silence unbroken save for a clang of six bells from the yacht, "don't let us quarrel—so soon, at any rate. Unless we want to behave like naughty children we have to make the best of each other's company for two whole hours yet."

Then the eyes flashed round at him; to his quite genuine distress, they were brimming with tears.

"So," gulped Miss Marita Pereira, plunging valiantly where a mere man would have kept quiet, "you

have not—begun—to imagine—why—Mr. Gleave—has brought you to Greystones?"

"No," he said, deeming it wise to ignore the rising storm.

"Very well. I don't care what you think of me, but I must tell you. You've got to marry me!"

"I— Really, Miss Pereira."

"And truly, Captain Colquhoun! And you'll be jolly clever if you escape. Mr. Gleave has his own way in everything—in everything, I repeat. His mind is set on this. He hinted it to me, so I don't see why I shouldn't hint it to you!"

Most fortunately, she failed to catch the glint of amusement that flashed across Colquhoun's eyes. A hint, she called it. What in the world would she say when she spoke plainly?

CHAPTER VII

SOME DISCOVERIES

When a man, especially a young man, little versed in the ways of women, is confronted by an extraordinarily difficult situation of the kind Colquhoun had now to deal with, he often has recourse to a species of elephantine humour. It dawned on him that this was Leap Year! Perhaps——

"I don't imagine for a moment you are trying to be funny at my expense," he bleated, "but—er—there's a sort of notion—I—er—believe—that once in every four years young ladies have the privilege of—er——"

"Do you think I am proposing to you?" the girl blazed at him. "Can you possibly persuade yourself that, after having spoken with you for even ten minutes, I want to marry you?"

"No. I don't. I haven't. On my honour, Miss Pereira, I hardly know what to say."

"People are supposed to fall in love before they marry," she raged on.

"Yes, yes. Of course."

"And we aren't in love with one another, are we?"

"If we *must* discuss the matter, we are not. It is absurd. As you yourself put it, an acquaintance of even ten minutes has shown you how completely undesirable I am as a prospective husband."

Marita contrived to smile through her tears.

"I did not mean that," she gulped hysterically. "But we have started all wrong. I really had no intention of being horrid. I—I want to wipe my eyes, and if I

use a handkerchief here I may be seen from the house. Let us walk a little way down the path—not quickly—just as though we were continuing our stroll, you know."

She could hardly have said anything better calculated to warn a stranger that things were not what they seemed in this sunlit domain. From that moment Colquhoun was aware of a sense of distrust in his surroundings which he never again lost while within the four walls of the Greystones estate. He had yielded to it for a brief space before entering the library, but the first glimpse of Francis Gleave's undeniably spiritual face and the unaffected warmth of the man's welcome had banished it. Now he knew that a girl who, however emotional, was thoroughly acquainted with her surroundings, had no doubt as to the existence of hidden influences which might be harmless but were certainly repressive. He that is forewarned is forearmed. Colquhoun's main problem thenceforth was how best to conceal his belief that danger might lurk in the very air he breathed. Yet he was forced to display an active curiosity, or he might learn little or nothing.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" he said, when they reached a turn in a zigzag footway. "It will look quite natural if I halt and fill my pipe."

"We are not out of sight yet," came the murmured reply.

"That is just why I suggest a short pause here."

"Probably you are right. Are you skilled in conspiracy, Captain Colquhoun?"

"I don't know, but I've had a fairly extensive training in the art of open-air camouflage. If you suspect that an enemy may be watching you it is necessary to make him believe you have no notion of his nearness. Sometimes the trick demands a steady nerve. For instance, I have stooped to tie a shoe-lace when I guessed, correctly as it happened, that the rocks on the

other side of a mullah held a score or more Afridis, all first-rate shots with a rifle."

"What did you gain by that?"

"I was able to mutter orders to my own crowd. When I said 'Scatter!' we were all under cover like so many startled rabbits, and the hillmen were so surprised that they fired and revealed their whereabouts."

"What good did that do?"

"It did them a lot of harm. You see, two-thirds of my men were hidden already just beyond the sky-line, merely waiting for the information."

"Does that mean you have reserves posted on the high road and in the village?"

"No. It means, in the first place, that I am trying to help you; in the second, that if every word I utter is to be twisted from its plain intent I shall shut up like an oyster."

"I'm sorry," said the girl contritely. "You see, I am not only trying to warn you but trusting you entirely."

"I realise that already. Well, be prepared for a slight shock. Watch me lighting my pipe, and listen. A yew hedge climbs halfway up the opposite cliff about a hundred yards inland. Apparently, it is intended to cloak the wall which lies behind it. A man, your worthy butler, I believe, has crept between hedge and wall nearly to the top, and is now, in all probability, surveying us through binoculars."

"Mr. Hick is the worst of them," and the bitterness in her voice was not the least surprising element in a conversation which had certainly not followed the beaten track of social usage thus far.

"How odd!" said Colquhoun. "Suppose we worry old Hick a bit, and then you will tell me, if you care to, what this is all about. I suggest that we go right down past the yacht, and sit on the pier-head. If we remain

there an hour or more Hick will find his job a rather slow one."

Rita entered into the spirit of this scheme at once, but with reservations, as she soon made clear.

"We cannot possibly enter the caves while Hick is looking on," she said. "I am beginning to wonder if he ever saw me wandering around in that direction."

"What direction? Don't point."

By a turn in the path they were facing inland.

"There is no need to point," she exclaimed quite gaily, and Colquhoun was glad to note that traces of tears were disappearing without the aid of any handkerchief. "You see how the rocks hang over a little just where the creek ends. The ledge on top, some twenty feet above high-water mark, is covered with briars, which are never cut, and have grown so dense that one cannot get through them without forcing a way, so I climb up the rock face and then down into the cleft. It starts again, you will notice, at the back. Even there, the entrances to both caves are choked up."

"They are not in use?" broke in Colquhoun.

She hesitated.

"Perhaps—occasionally—about once a year," she faltered. "Oh, please don't think ill of me for telling you these things. I have no one to confide in, and it did seem, since you were brought here for—for what I said—I might at least prepare you for the risk."

"Risk!" He could not help laughing.

"Now you are being unkind. I don't mean about our—about me. *I* really don't care what happens. I suppose there's a big world outside—beyond the hills, across the seas—but I have seen little of it, except from the windows of railway trains, coming here from Brussels. My earlier journey from India is a sort of *mirage*. All I know of life I have learnt from books, with just scraps of information, or guesswork, picked

up from other girls at school. During the past two years I have not read a newspaper, a magazine or a modern novel."

"No newspaper? Surely——"

"They are absolutely forbidden at Greystones. The servants obey the rules, too. They are paid very high wages, and can get away to their homes almost as often as they like, or, rather, when they can wheedle leave out of Mr. Hick. But, once here, they might as well live in a prison. You have come to a strange place, Captain Colquhoun."

"I think," he said, "it is quite a delightful house, and the grounds are charming. How wonderful this gorge must be at sunset, when daylight has been shut off an hour or more and the only radiance is that reflected from sky and water!"

He caught the girl's stare of bewilderment, and winked at her brazenly. She took his cue quickly enough, and expressed her own preference for the gardens in twilight. They kept up this aimless chatter until they reached the quay and passed the yacht, from whose forward deck a couple of sailors saluted smartly.

They were literally halfway along the westerly pier before Colquhoun explained.

"A dark-complexioned chap dressed like a ship's steward came ashore hurriedly five minutes ago," he said. "He did not pass us, nor did I see him on any part of the path up the gorge, which obviously supplies a short cut to the front of the house——"

"Yes, through a tunnel."

"I was inclined to assume the tunnel, or that path would hardly ever be used, whereas it is well worn. However, the steward-person must be hiding among the shrubs, and would hear what we were talking about, so I took care he was duly edified. I am beginning to

believe you do live in a queerly-conducted establishment, Miss Pereira."

"I shall never have any real faith in you if you address me like Mr. Hick, or Mr. McGregor, the head gardener."

"Very well—Rita, then. But you must play up."

"I want to—Arthur."

"Splendid! Now tell me as much or as little as you like."

"Badri Lal, the steward, is a Madrassi. He speaks English fluently. He, of course, was warned by wireless that we would pass that way, and told to find out what we were discussing."

"Wireless, eh? Through an installation on the yacht?"

"We have it everywhere. It is quite uncanny. At Mr. Gleave's volition he can speak to anyone privately through a receiver or make his voice heard in any room and in most parts of the grounds."

"By Jove!" And Colquhoun whistled softly.

"What is it now?" demanded the girl.

"If he can speak he can probably hear?"

"Yes. That is why I brought you by the cliff path. It is so seldom used that it is outside the practical zone, which is a phrase I once caught from Mr. Hick. But I doubt if the pier-head is."

"We'll try and find out. Do you sing?"

"Not often nowadays. At school they said I had a fortune in my voice, whatever that may mean."

"As we approach that lantern on a tripod which marks the entrance to the harbour we must discuss music. I'll ask you to sing. Don't be shy, but start something. I shall be delighted to listen, in any event, and the experiment may be useful, while it can hardly fail to bamboozle the other fellow. I hope you follow, Rita. It's a variant of my bootlace-tying dodge to lull the enemy's suspicions."

And thus it was that the girl, in response to a nod from Colquhoun, said in the most casual way:

"My tastes really lie with the classical and operatic. I love some of the airs in 'La Bohème.' Do you know this one?"

Forthwith she broke into the glorious strains of "Mi chiamano Mimi," and her hearer was so taken with that romance of the Lucia who was called Mimi, she knew not why, that he was tempted to neglect the very test he had designed. Rita did sing most excellently. She was well worth listening to, even unaccompanied. Moreover, it might be that this outburst of song did not lack the temperamental fire of an ardent soul yielding to the first vague stirring of the mating instinct. Who knows? Even the man, with eyes glued on the two transmitters cleverly concealed in the base of the electric lamp which surmounted the tripod, felt something of the glamour of the moment. But he sensed, too, the very real danger of an environment which demanded all these tricks and scientific subterfuges to maintain some vague control over external forces—whether as a fad or a public menace he had no present means of knowing. It was now established beyond question that Francis Gleave's asceticism was a cloak for some curiously misdirected display of energy. What did it all mean? How did it affect him, Arthur Colquhoun? And, to his credit be it said, he did not fail to regard as vastly more important the query—how did it affect the very charming girl now delighting his ear with a flood of melody?

"Thank you," he said, when the last perfect note had floated away into the silent air. "I have never before been so utterly swamped in any controversy. My excuse is that I am better acquainted with modern French music. One holds insensibly by that which one understands, and therefore appreciates best. Of course, I cannot illustrate, so I cannot compete, but, quite

honestly, I had no idea that the Italian school was keeping itself so thoroughly abreast of the times."

"I hope you are being quite sincere," said the girl. "Music is essentially a progressive art. Some of it—the work of the accepted masters—is for all time. But much is for a period."

"An admirable comment if we were in a South Kensington studio and engaged in a soulful discussion of the Russian ballet. But I am sure your uncle will be annoyed with us if we neglect his system of fruit culture. He spoke of it, and I am expected to sample the products at luncheon. What in the world will he think of you as a guide when I tell him that all I have seen of the marvels of Greystones is a wide sweep of the North Sea from the head of one of your piers?"

From that moment Colquhoun took no further chances. He wanted to know so much that it was folly to think of muttered questions and answers in places where such subdued talk could not, or, put more accurately, might not, be overheard. They must take, or make, some other opportunity.

Try as he might, he saw no other signs of an electric installation. Above the house, he knew, fluttered the flimsy aerial of the ordinary wireless set authorised by departmental licence. That, of course, was merely a blind. Greystones must have an exceptionally powerful equipment for sending and receiving messages. He was almost convinced, too, that some basic principle was at work which he had never even heard of. The thought evoked a memory. Could it be possible that a scientific-minded recluse living in this remote part of Norfolk was the unknown experimenter for whom the wireless authorities were searching so eagerly? He wished now he had learnt more of the facts which his friend in the "Rag" seemed to have at command. Had the existence of this secret electrical or magnetic control put Scotland Yard in motion? He

could not guess. The detectives had given no hint. Perhaps some clue might be forthcoming from the chat with the local policeman arranged for that evening. It was most unlikely that a village constable would be in the inner circle of such knowledge as the high officers of the Criminal Investigation Department possessed. Yet the man must be well versed in local history. Perhaps he, Colquhoun, fitting scraps of information into their places in the light of an already rather intimate acquaintance with the potentialities, if nothing else, of Greystones, might add considerably to his own store. He would see.

The tunnel, a lofty, well-ventilated passage hewn out of the solid rock, pierced the cliff at an easy grade, and came out in rear and a little to eastward of the house. At that end the excavation was extensive, and harboured an electric lighting plant.

Colquhoun's ear caught the beat of a powerful engine and hum of a large wheel.

"Mr. Gleave does not mean to run short of light," he commented. "He must have dynamos in there capable of supplying ten times the current needed."

The girl nodded listlessly.

"There are two engines," she said. "They take it in turn—an eight-hours' shift, I think the men call it. But I am not encouraged to go inside. It is dangerous, they say."

"That's true enough, though such live sections should be fenced off. However, I am no mechanic. I know some of the jargon, but its real meaning is a closed book."

He exaggerated his ignorance, but a remark of that sort was non-committal.

The gardens and greenhouses compelled his honest admiration. They might have been contrived by a beneficent wizard. Fruits and vegetables were there in all stages of development—seasonal in the open and

advanced under glass by heat and even by artificial sunlight.

Throughout many months of the year the owner of Greystones need never lack the vegetarian diet he evidently favoured. He might not care for the flesh-pots of Egypt but he was evidently a sybarite in all else, as his wines bore witness.

Shortly before the lunch hour Colquhoun was received by a scrupulously correct butler and shown to the library again, where he had a few moments of leisure to examine the books. They had been chosen by an expert, the would-be reader having a wide range at choice, from complete sets of standard authors in European literature to a collection of Persi-Arabic and Sanskrit works such as might not be found again outside the walls of the British Museum.

But, if the visitor's eyes were ostensibly fixed on the crowded shelves, they were also trying to pierce less obvious records. For instance, how did Gleave summon that footman at the very moment the man was wanted? It was easy to circle the chair in which he had been seated, but there was no sign of any hidden electric bell in the upholstery. A detailed examination was not to be thought of, so Colquhoun took from a shelf a beautiful copy of the Zendavesta in manuscript on vellum, and carried it to a window, ostensibly to scrutinise the delicacy of the penmanship but really to look at the window itself. Here he was repaid. Around the outer framework—the rectangle of the window as a whole, that is—ran an iron shield, perforated with two-inch circular holes at frequent intervals; behind, and close up to, each orifice was an electric lamp. What a curious fitment! And to what purpose? It could not possibly light the interior, save faintly. It brought memories of exhibitions, so-called, which appeal to the amusement-loving dwellers in London and other great cities.

He was considering this problem when he knew by operation of that sixth sense which every good soldier must have, that the door of the library had opened noiselessly, and that he was being surveyed by someone who had intended to take him by surprise. He turned over a few leaves of the volume in his hand.

"Ah!" said Gleave's suave voice, "I see you have discovered one of my treasures, Arthur. I may address you in that familiar way, I am sure. The name is glib on my tongue. It was your father's."

Colquhoun nearly yielded to an inexplicable feeling of repulsion against this needless reference to the past, but he conquered it, and turned with a smile.

"I was so taken up with the perfection of this script," he said, "that I did not even hear you come in, sir. What a magnificent library you own! I have hardly glanced at a tenth of its contents, yet find myself wondering what the remainder can hold."

"It is mainly scientific. Rita hardly ever deigns to notice these two walls," and Gleave indicated by a gesture fully two thousand books. "Perhaps, while roaming through the grounds, you discovered some of her tastes. I have tried, and failed."

"But she is very musical," said Colquhoun, duly surprised.

"Modern Italian, and Russian! Puccini and Orensky! Pooh!" Gleave swept those eminent composers into oblivion with contemptuous hands. "The East has gradations in the diatonic scale which the West has never even dreamed of. But, luncheon is ready. Let us rescue Rita from the dreary expanse of the drawing-room!"

So the trap had sprung. Actually, Colquhoun had brought off a neat display of subconscious cerebration when he led the listener-in to speak of Puccini.

A light, admirably cooked meal was served. Gleave ate a morsel of fish, an apple, and a peach. He took

as long to consume this scanty fare as the two young people with healthy appetites to deal much more thoroughly with the dishes provided.

The talk dealt with India and its recent political changes. By no word did Gleave show that his ideas ran counter to the accepted traditions of British rule in the East. He was simply a courteous and well-informed host.

With the coffee and cigarettes he brought a flush of pleasure to the girl's face by an unexpected announcement.

"I am sure Captain Colquhoun's time is at our disposal for the afternoon," he said, "so I have ordered the limousine. It is at the door now. You two can take yourselves off to Norwich, where you will find an excellent picture theatre which has a matinée at half past two. Then, if you like to have tea and a look at the shops, you can return by seven o'clock, or thereabouts. . . . The car will drop you at your inn for dinner, Arthur, and I hope you will find it convenient to come here again tomorrow."

Colquhoun was certainly astonished—none the less because Marita Pereira seemed hardly able to understand her guardian's cheerful attitude. The younger man thought it would be well to fall in with Mr. Gleave's plans by improving on them.

"As for tomorrow, if the weather holds, I have been wondering if I might take Miss Pereira for a few hours' fishing," he said. "A man in the inn last night spoke of the prospects being good just now."

"Capital!" agreed Gleave at once. "It will be quite a change for my little girl. She is far too closely immured here. I forget these things. Why not breakfast with Rita at nine? Hick will have a basket packed, and your boat can come into the harbour at ten. The owner will supply rods and bait, no doubt. You can arrange all that in the village. . . . Well, goodbye,

Arthur. If not tomorrow I shall see you next day. . . . Let me know when you arrive home, Rita."

So, in the simplest yet utterly unforeseen way, Colquhoun found himself seated by the girl's side in a most comfortable car, and whirring almost silently along the high road to Norwich, a good thirty miles distant from Keynham.

CHAPTER VIII

A LIVELY AFTERNOON

THE two were in the car soon after half past one. Marita, who seemed rather stunned, did not even suggest that she ought to change her costume; that great thought only occurred to her after the lodge was passed.

"How absurd!" she cried in real distress. "People will think I am crazy—appearing in the streets of Norwich like this."

"What's the matter with your rig?" said Colquhoun. Man-like, he regarded her summery attire as highly effective, and the weather was so warm that she hardly needed a wrap.

"The matter!" she repeated, with scorn. "Walking about in a wide-brimmed straw hat and an orange scarf!"

"You don't wish to go back?"

"Anything but that."

"There are shops in Norwich. You can rectify all defects in five minutes."

"But I have no money. On the rare occasions I am sent shopping Mr. Hick and a maid always come with me. Mr. Hick pays the bills."

"What do you want to buy—a hat and a coat, I take it?"

"Yes."

"I have plenty of money—up to twenty or thirty pounds, at any rate."

"Oh, what fun! Uncle will laugh when I tell him. With all his faults he is not stingy. I'll pay you back

tomorrow at breakfast. It was stupid of me to rush off in such a hurry, but I was so bewildered that my head whirled. My only wish was to feel the car speeding along the road. Of course, you don't know what it means to have——"

Somehow, Colquhoun anticipated her words. He was sure she would compare Greystones with a prison, and the opening of its gates with freedom.

"Ouch!" he cried, bouncing in his seat. The chauffeur's head moved ever so slightly.

"Did something hurt you?" inquired the girl.

"I got a rap on the knee from a piece of shrapnel in France, and I feel it occasionally when I sit down awkwardly."

He bent forward and rubbed his right knee with both hands.

"There! It's gone now. I may not feel it again for months," he said aloud. But he added, in a rapid whisper: "Wait till we're in Norwich, and are rid of this chap."

Straightening himself, he went on in an ordinary tone:

"Which will you visit first, the shop or the theatre?"

"The shop, of course!" laughed Rita. "I wouldn't be seen dead in this hat by any other woman."

For all that, though very much alive and bright-cheeked after a swift rush through the summer air, she was not only seen but closely scrutinised by two other women as she stepped out of the car in front of a big department store with enough feminine garments on display behind gigantic plate-glass windows to clothe the female population of a small town.

Colquhoun had alighted, and was holding open the door of the limousine, when he noticed a smile of recognition on Rita's face; she flushed so deeply that her skin positively darkened.

"Who would have dreamed of meeting *you,* Lady

Weybourne?" she cried, tripping across the pavement with outstretched hand. "I spoke of you to uncle the other day, and he said you were in London. Do, please excuse my appearance. I was just darting in here to buy a decent hat and a wrap of some sort."

She spoke breathlessly but was coherent. The elder of the two ladies standing in the doorway of the shop was decidedly flurried.

"We travelled from town this morning, and called here after lunch, before going to Leyton," she said. "I think you haven't met my niece, Evelyn Hilton. Evelyn, this is—bother, if I haven't gone and forgotten your Christian name——"

"Marita!"

"Yes, of course. Mr. Gleave made some absurd joke about Little Mary, Mary being Evelyn's second name. I have it now. Marita Pereira. Mr. Gleave is an old friend, Evelyn, and Marita is his ward. Come and see us some day soon. We shall not be at all crowded at Leyton until the partridges come in, so you will find us thoroughly *en famille*."

The Viscountess Weybourne was not quite her aristocratic self. This collision was as unexpected, and possibly as undesired, by her as by the young lady from Greystones. She herself could not have explained that delightful *non sequitur*, because Mr. Gleave's humour must have been pointed at Marita and not at Evelyn. She did not notice, therefore, that Evelyn Hilton and Arthur Colquhoun were staring at each other with a blank disregard of the statutes made and provided for the use of polite society.

Rita Pereira was more observant, however. She may have been puzzled, but she certainly was not pleased. Her embarrassment passed instantly. She became the most self-possessed person present.

"Do you know Captain Colquhoun?" she said calmly. "He is staying in Keynham, and lunched at Greystones

today, so uncle packed us off to Norwich for the afternoon."

Lady Weybourne's thin features twitched, a sign of nervousness, or annoyance, as Sir Maurice Gleave had interpreted it.

"Colquhoun, did you say?" she murmured, as though the mere name had evoked highly disagreeable memories.

At that moment Evelyn Hilton smiled, with that air of slightly contemptuous detachment which was becoming rather too familiar in Colquhoun's eyes. Having done nothing to deserve such treatment at her hands, he lashed out mercilessly.

"We are unfortunate in our meetings, Lady Weybourne," he said, and the icy distinctness of his voice left no excuse for a display of well-bred indifference. "The first time we were complete strangers. I happened, by chance, to be standing by the side of Sir Maurice Gleave in St. James's Park, when you and Miss Hilton were going to the palace. Today, though I am in more reputable company, my mere name seems to have annoyed you."

"But what have I said to make you think that?" bleated the Viscountess. She was genuinely distressed, and, in honest fact, had not the slightest desire to behave rudely to anyone.

"Don't worry, auntie," broke in Evelyn Hilton. "Captain Colquhoun is hitting at me, not at you! I know why he is so angry. It really doesn't affect you at all. . . . I see our car is here. . . . Goodbye, Miss Pereira. Do come to Leyton soon. I shall be there for a month at least."

Lady Weybourne was only too glad to be hustled away, nor did Colquhoun make any move to assist either her or her niece.

"Well!" gasped Marita. "I never did!"

"Nor have I, often," agreed Colquhoun bitterly. "What about instructions to your chauffeur?"

"Oh, he can call for us at the Maid's Head Hotel at six. We'll have tea after the cinema."

Colquhoun, still smarting under the lash of Evelyn Hilton's manifest disapproval of his connection with the Gleave *ménage,* caught a curiously weighing underlook in the chauffeur's face when Miss Pereira's orders were passed on.

"You heard what I said?" he snapped at the man.

"Yes, sir."

"You have plenty of time, therefore, to readjust that mirror so that it shows traffic coming up from the rear instead of reflecting the people seated in the car."

"Really, sir, I——"

"Oh, that's all right. I want to forget it. Go and amuse yourself somewhere at my expense for the next three hours."

He produced a ten-shilling note, which, after a slight hesitation, the driver took, with a silent salute.

"Why are you pitching into Brook?" inquired Rita. "He is awfully careful on the road, I believe."

"I don't question his skill, but I did want to make him understand that I am not wholly a fool, which the servants at Greystones seem to take for granted. I have reason to believe now that Mr. Gleave will draw another blank, because Brook will not care that his master should know he was found out so easily."

"My, but we have heaps to talk about!" cried the girl. "Please let me get through my shopping quickly. Do come and help. I believe you will show good taste in hats. Didn't you like Evelyn Hilton's costume? I thought it sweet."

It chanced that Evelyn, like Colquhoun himself, wore exactly the same garments as on the day they met in Hyde Park. For that reason, if for none other, recognition had been immediate.

Colquhoun, still fuming, blurted out the first words on his lips.

"I hardly noticed how she was dressed," he said. "All I know is that I am in no mood to tolerate her affected superiority. At any rate, this time I left her under no delusion as to my opinion of her."

"I had no idea you could be so snippy," said Marita, who had recovered her high spirits. "Yes, please, the millinery department." This to an inquiring shop-walker.

For quarter of an hour Colquhoun had to pose as a critic. Of course he was voted utterly wrong in his views on colour-schemes and styles. His companion paid seven pounds for a woollen sports coat and three pounds for a *cloche* hat. She demanded a receipt.

"Mr. Hick is very particular about what he calls vouchers," she explained, "and I shall have to collect from him in the morning. And now I vote we go to the picture-house. If it isn't interesting we can visit the Castle Gardens."

Colquhoun was well aware that his ordeal was only postponed, but the respite was helpful. He was at least being given time to decide how much or how little he would say to a girl now bubbling over with an ill-repressed curiosity. Could he tell her the sordid story of the Gleave family as he knew it? Would he be justified in doing so? He thought not. He failed to see any good purpose behind such a revelation. Yet she seemed resolved to trust him implicitly; her candour called for reciprocity. More than ever did he feel that his present existence was unreal and, indeed, a trifle undignified. For instance, he should not have spoken so rudely to Lady Weybourne because of Evelyn Hilton's supercilious attitude. Her ladyship was startled when she heard his name; but why should she not be, with Sir Maurice Gleave's saturnine personality fresh in her memory? She must think it strange, in-

deed, that the son of the man he had killed should be in his company in the Park and now be hobnobbing with members of the family in Norfolk.

He was free to review the situation while a tedious "triangle" story flickered through thousands of feet of film. Even Rita, to whom such pictured sex problems were new, felt the strain of a series of wild improbabilities. At the close of a nauseating "close-up," when the heroine's glycerine tears and the coarse texture of the hero's skin were too painfully evident, she whispered that she had had enough.

"It's stuffy in here," she confided, "and we left a really fine afternoon outside. Let's hook it!"

The school-girl phrase proved that she was back to normal. She did not even try to disguise her interest in Evelyn Hilton as they walked up Davey-place to the Castle, and such frankness would have been significant to one who understood the ways of women.

"How thrilling that you should have met Lady Weybourne's niece!" she said, once they were free from the dense traffic out of Castle-street. "I didn't even know she existed. The Viscountess has come to Greystones three times during the past two years, but she always brought with her a bent old man who talked business with her and Mr. Gleave after luncheon."

"I never set eyes on Miss Hilton until three days ago," said Colquhoun. "Even then we did not meet, in the sense of being introduced. To speak precisely I must explain that while a man who was a stranger to me but who turned out to be a close relative of your guardian's, was standing by my side in the Mall, a car containing Lady Weybourne and her niece halted close to us. Her ladyship and my chance companion looked at one another. Obviously they were anything but friends. Their manner showed it. Next morning, while passing through Hyde Park, I met Miss Hilton escorted by her dog, a fine Borzoi. I was taken by the hound,

but she remembered me, and wanted to know the name of the man who out-stared her aunt. I refused to tell her, at first, and she got angry. She seems still to be in the same mind."

"Who was the man?"

"Of course, you were sure to ask that. Rendered wise by adversity, I answer at once—Sir Maurice Gleave—Mr. Francis Gleave's half-brother, and heir to the Gleave baronetcy."

"But I have never even heard of him!" said the girl, with wide-open eyes.

"Exactly what I said of Mr. Francis Gleave when told he was advertising for me in the *Times*. So we are quits on that score, and my advice to you is that you should forget the very existence of Sir Maurice Gleave. He is a bad hat. He is the only living person whom I hate and loathe beyond expression. I see now that Lady Weybourne probably has her own reasons for sharing my opinion. If ever I have the opportunity, I shall apologise for my rudeness today. But my regret does not extend to Miss Evelyn Hilton. *She* knew the truth, and chose to disregard it. In a word, she behaved badly, and I was stupid enough to feel hurt —for a moment. Suppose we talk of something else. I have not had a chance of examining your car, but am convinced it carries a portable wireless installation. That is why I asked you not to discuss matters we did not want overheard. Mr. Gleave must surely be a veritable crank in that respect. Does he sport a portable receiver and transmitter in his waistcoat pocket?"

"If such a thing is possible he certainly does. I am so scared of his electrical dodges that I lock my bedroom door every night. . . . Oh, yes, that is a silly thing to say," because Colquhoun laughed outright, "but what I mean is that I do want to have my own room to myself. Though Greystones is heated from a

central furnace I felt so suspicious of noises in the chimney one night last winter that I lit a fire with old boxes and packing-paper. My! There was such a row! You would think I had murdered someone!"

"Do you personally never listen-in on the wireless set which the house reveals to all the world?"

"Yes, regularly. It is contained in a cabinet in the drawing-room. I hear the news, and the concerts, and the speeches. I'm quite a dab at tuning-in."

"Does Mr. Gleave use it?"

"Not he. *His* show is in a back room on the first floor. I am never admitted *there,* but I got a peep one morning when he was asleep. A plumber had to fix a broken rain-pipe, and left his ladder while he fetched some gadget he wanted. I just went up and had a good look. There wasn't much to see, really. Just some levers, a bright steel table, shaped like a huge box, some steel chairs with india-rubber coverings, and a couple of head-phones. As a Chamber of Horrors it was most uninteresting. But my uncle allows no one to enter—no one. The house is locked up every night at ten, and Mr. Hick taps at the door of that room to announce the fact. Then Mr. Gleave turns on a current of some sort, and the servants all believe that if anyone dared open an outer door or window until seven in the morning he or she would be electrocuted."

"Isn't it remarkable that a set of English servants can be persuaded to remain in the house under such peculiar conditions?"

"No. I don't think so. Their wages are high, and they have plenty of liberty. They live well, too. The housekeeping bills are never questioned. Mr. Gleave, who eats cereals, fruit and nuts, never smokes, and rarely takes a glass of wine, pays thousands a year for food and service. He must be very, very rich."

These young people, as smart a couple as was abroad that day in Norwich, were passing scores of reputable

dwellers in an old and staid Cathedral city of the most law-abiding country in the world. They differed in no marked respect from others of their class. They were revelling insensibly in the sweet air and bright sunshine, yet their conversation dealt with things either incredibly strange and foolish or dangerously occult. Colquhoun had expressed himself already as no believer in the range or sincerity of Eastern mysticism. If pressed for the reasons underlying his opinions he would have said, modestly enough, that he knew little about the topic. He had tried to see and inquire, but had failed. The East can find no ground on which to meet the West but the field of conflict, a statement unfortunately true both in ethics and in social convictions. Of course, there was a logical reasonableness in Mr. Gleave's contention that Nature would hardly create the first delicate vessels containing the lamps of knowledge and then shatter the Indian and Chinese moulds so completely that it took the West two thousand years to reconstruct them. But what had all this theorising to do with life on a summer's day in after-the-war England?

"O, la, la!" broke in Marita's laughing voice. "How glum you are looking! You don't like walking with me in the Castle Gardens—is that it?"

Then Colquhoun pulled himself together, and exerted his wits to amuse his companion. He succeeded so well that they avoided all further reference to Greystones and its secrets not alone during tea but while they drove back to Keynham.

The next day's projected fishing excursion supplied a good excuse for leaving the inn soon after dinner. Colquhoun found the boatman at home, made the necessary arrangements, not without evoking an expression of surprise when Gleave's private harbour was given as the rendezvous, and then, seizing his opportunity, reached the policeman's house.

The door opened before he could knock. Evidently, he was being watched for.

"Come in, sir," said the constable himself. "One of the girls in the post-office over there does a lot of telephonin' to Mr. Hick at the Hall, but she's at supper now, and the office is closed."

"I have not seen any telephone wires along that road," said Colquhoun.

"No, sir. They run in a pipe underground. All the poles were blown down by a north-easter some years ago, and Mr. Gleave went to the expense of having his own line protected in that way. Mr. Gleave has a habit of getting things done exactly as suits him best. May I ask, sir, how you got along with him?"

"Splendidly! He's a bit of a theorist, a faddist, perhaps, but no one could complain of him as a host, and he sent me off to Norwich with a nice girl in a car for the afternoon. Nothing to complain of in that, is there?"

"No, sir. I saw you start. And one of the electricians followed you on a motor-bike."

"Did he, begad?"

"Yes, an' kep' track of you, too. He didn't leave for home till you an' the young lady were havin' tea in the 'Maid's Head.' Someone in Greystones knows every step you took in the city."

"You 'phoned from here, I suppose?"

"Not I. I hopped on my bike an' went to the Junction."

The inference was clear, too clear to be agreeable, in fact.

"You people round here seem to have a wholesome respect for Mr. Gleave—or, is it fear?" said Colquhoun.

"Call it what you like, sir. I don't imagine he can hear what is going on in this cottage, but I wouldn't trust my own voice on the high road, an' that's a fact."

"I suppose you have been told I am a reliable person, but stop me if I ask questions you don't care to answer. I shall not be annoyed. I know what discipline means. To begin then, is Mr. Gleave under suspicion in any way?"

"No sir, not exactly. Greystones was searched soon after War broke out, because it was a nest of Germans, an' Mr. Gleave went back there about 1916. There was only one incident—did you notice the electric lights outside?"

"Yes—most peculiar."

"Well, if a door or window is opened after a certain switch is turned on at night, the whole place blazes like the advertising signs in Piccadilly-Circus. You never saw anythink like it. The idea is that if burglars try to break in they will rouse the country side. That very thing happened at Christmas, 1917, and the military authorities were fair wild. But the excitement cooled down when it was shown that a gale that night blew a tree over and smashed a window. Mr. Gleave promised to have the wires disconnected, which he did, straight off. About two years ago he got permission from the county police to have the signal fixed again."

"Curious, but not alarming, all that."

"Just so, sir. The folks round here keep an eye on Greystones because its ways are odd. But its money is good, too, so no one says too much. Not that there is anything to say, if you understand, sir. Greystones is just different, an' these Norfolk villagers can't get the hang of things. Of course, when the other Gleaves lived there—the titled ones—they were little kings in this locality. But they lost their money, and the last one, Sir Maurice, came a cropper. Jolly near got hanged, he did, but managed to escape that. He was sent to penal servitude, though, an' has just been released, after serving eleven years. An' that's the cause of the present excitement. No one in Keynham, out-

side Greystones, knows a word about it except you an' me. Sir Maurice is Mr. Francis's half-brother, though I'm told you'd never think it by lookin' at 'em, an' the two hate each other like poison. Mr. Francis believes, or says he believes, that Sir Maurice means to kill him, an' has applied for police protection. The super informs me that you are in touch with the big wigs at the 'Yard,' an' I'm to keep you up to any moves we make locally, the idea bein', I suppose, that, if you know what is goin' on, you may be able to help. Is all this new to you, sir?"

"Yes—and No. I heard something of the threat, which, by the way, Sir Maurice laughs at. He says it is utterly unfounded. But my connection with the affair is an astonishing one. By the way, what is your name?"

"Wilkinson, sir."

"Well, Wilkinson, the man for whose death Sir Maurice was responsible was my father."

"God bless my soul!" cried the policeman, dropping his pipe on a table which stood in the centre of the room. From there it bounded to the floor, and some red-hot tobacco fell on a sheep-skin rug stretched before the grate. Instantly the wool burst into a furious flame.

The policeman, with hospitable intent, had staged a flask of whiskey and a syphon of soda-water. Colquhoun seized the syphon, and Wilkinson dashed into the kitchen for a pail of water. Between them they managed to diminish the volume of fire and roll up the skin. Then they had the outbreak under partial control, and were just able to throw the burning mass into a small back garden when it flamed out again, and was speedily consumed.

"Well," gasped the representative of the law, "didje ever see anythink like that?"

"Often," said Colquhoun. "That rug had been

steeped in some highly inflammable chemical compound. Have you had it in your house long?"

"Hardly a week, sir. I bought it from a village dealer who picks up odds and ends at sales and from people clearing things out of their houses. It came from Greystones. He told me so at the time. What the—what does it all mean?"

CHAPTER IX

AN INTERLUDE

"It means, I think, that we must use our brains rather actively if we would fathom Mr. Francis Gleave's real purpose in life," said Colquhoun gravely.

Wilkinson's thoughts, however, were focussed on a more insistent problem.

"An' wot am I to tell my missus when she comes in an' finds the rug gone an' the carpet next door to a cinder?" he demanded. "She's out at a neighbour's. Here she comes now, runnin'. I'll bet some busybody has up an' tole her the house is on fire!"

The man's distress was comical. Evidently, there were other dread powers in the land, powers far more potent than a distant superintendent. So Colquhoun took charge. He guessed that Scotland Yard might be glad to pay for the destroyed sheepskin because of the information it conveyed.

"Sorry I'm such a clumsy person, Mrs. Wilkinson," he said to a breathless woman not at all sure whether she ought to be sympathetic or irate. "The hearth-rug got burnt through a lighted pipe falling on it. There are other damages, too. How much did the rug cost?"

Mrs. Wilkinson was so excited that she gave the exact amount—fifteen shillings. Colquhoun produced two pounds.

"This should cover the loss," he said pleasantly.

"But we're insured against fire, sir," protested the policeman.

"All the better. Your wife will be able to buy a far better rug."

"There's quite a crowd in the street," said Mrs. Wilkinson, hoping to divert her soul-mate from the strait path of financial probity.

"By gum! So there is!" cried Wilkinson. "You keep out of sight, sir. I'll shift 'em."

Standing on the front door-step, he asked certain inhabitants of Keynham what they were gaping at, a rather offensive form of question which seemed to act as a solvent. Mrs. Wilkinson, after a rapid survey of the black and shrivelled patches of skin in the back garden, was unable to understand how such a blaze could have sprung up unnoticed while there were two men in the room. Colquhoun realised that if unchecked she would talk, so told her quite seriously that the burning of the rug was a matter not to be discussed with anyone locally. She knew where it came from, of course; being a policeman's wife she was aware also of certain reticences imposed by her husband's occupation, so she went upstairs to hunt for the insurance policy.

Wilkinson closed the door, and mixed a whiskey and soda—in equal parts.

"I wanted that," he announced. "Gemme quite a turn, that did! Didjer spot the white flame, an' the heat of it, sir?"

"That tells the whole story, I imagine," said Colquhoun. "Someone either upset a quantity of some highly inflammable chemical compound over that rug, or, having spilled the stuff, used the rug to mop it up. Then a servant, ignorant of the fact that the wool when dried would be as dangerous as when it was soaked, instead of doing what was ordered and throwing the rug away, sold it. The solution of the mystery may start with your fifteen shillings, Wilkinson."

"If this affair gets out, an' it's bound to, Mr. Hick will be in trouble," commented the policeman, shrewdly enough.

"I agree with you there. I think you ought to try and see him tonight, and warn him, not openly, but by complaining about the loss of the rug. Probably you will touch him for another fifteen shillings, at least, because you will speak of the carpet, too. In my opinion, we don't want to create any degree of tension at Greystones just now. I haven't the least notion what the police authorities may have in mind, but I am convinced they would prefer events to follow the beaten track until they have gone farther into the matter which interests them, whatever it may be. They may regard your rug as a highly important clue. Who knows?"

So it befell that Colquhoun did not have a protracted talk with his official ally that evening. Weeks later, when the mists had cleared, and he was able to review the strange happenings of a few crowded hours in their true significance, he decided that the accident in Police-Constable Wilkinson's cottage and the resultant break-off of their conversation were factors of supreme value in the final dissolution of a most dangerous confederacy.

For the summer's night was yet young when he reached the inn, and found assembled there the same company as on the previous evening. The boat-owner extended an almost proprietorial air of welcome, but the others greeted him with a furtive if respectful curiosity which was explained when one of the farmers said:

"Beg pardon, sir, but is your name pronounced differ-ent-like from how it is spelled?"

Colquhoun held forth on Scottish peculiarities in that respect. He felt that these Keynham folk were angling for information of a more personal nature, but saw no reason why he should supply it.

"I hope you won't take it a-miss, captin, but anyone who has lived long enough in this part of Norfolk

can't help rememberin' how that name is mixed up with Sir Maurice Gleave's trouble," persisted the other.

"That is quite natural. But Mr. Francis Gleave can hardly be held responsible in any degree for his half-brother's crime."

"No, no."

"That's on'y fair."

These grudging comments were followed by an awkward silence, which the boat-owner broke by saying:

"We mean to be friendly, captin, an' that's a fact. You see, every man here knew Sir Maurice, an' liked him. We was properly rattled, I can tell you, when we read the evidence at his trial. Forgery, embezzlement, an' somethink like murder—well, it was a proper knock-out. We just couldn't believe it."

"But a judge and jury did believe, and he was sent to penal servitude."

"There's no gettin' over that, we admit, but, if you see what I mean, there didn't seem to be any solid reason behind all this wrong-doin'. When a rascal forges another man's name, steals his money, an' ends up by killin' him, it seldom happens that a third party rolls in gold because of such terrible misdeeds. An' that's exactly what followed in this case. I remember the newspaper reports well. Sir Maurice was a trustee of the bank, an' persuaded Mr.—persuaded the manager —to bolster up the shares of some weak shippin' companies. Soon after the trial the shares dropped to ninepence an' a shillin' in two of 'em, an' to half-a-crown in a third. Then came the War, an' Mr. Francis Gleave turned out to be the owner of a controllin' interest in all three companies. He sold out at £4 and £5 a share, an' is supposed now to hold well over a million invested in war bonds at five per cent. Sir Maurice's attack on his life-long friend, the bank manager, was a bad thing, but deng me if I can see where the forgery an' em-

bezzlement came in, because the paid-up capital of the bank was on'y quarter of a million."

"Ay. That's right," from one of the farmers.

"T' parson hisself couldn't have put it straighter." Thus the other.

"There was nothing to prevent Mr. Francis Gleave from buying the shares," said Colquhoun, with an uneasy consciousness that he was acting as devil's advocate.

"The papers made out that the trustees an' the bank manager owned a large part of 'em already—before the break-up, that is."

"But—I know little or nothing of the actual record—did not the bank go into liquidation?"

"Voluntry, sir—voluntry. A very different thing from compulsry. The bank itself was gobbled up by one of the big joint stock concerns. Even there Mr. Maurice Gleave was no loser. He's the registered owner of a hundred thousand pounds block in the larger company. You see, we can't help hearin' about these items. What between income-tax commissioners an' assessment committees, they leak out."

"They do, an' all," exclaimed the landlord bitterly.

This comment exercised a cryptic influence. The boat-owner instantly ordered drinks round, and, as Colquhoun still declined to satisfy local curiosity—gossip, for once, being absolutely on the right track—the talk veered to the prospects of sport next day. The sun had set in a mackerel sky, he was told, and the Fisherman's Rest was concerned with prophetic accuracy rather than cloud effects. Some days later he heard that the local tax-collectors had compelled Mr. Knyvitt to disgorge a large slice of war profits earned by catering.

Before retiring for the night Colquhoun wrote to Furneaux a fairly comprehensive summary of the day's experiences, not omitting the boat-owner's singularly

lucid statement as to the Gleave family's financial operations. Next morning he was about to drop the letter in the village post-office box when he recalled P. C. Wilkinson's scepticism as to the trustworthiness of one of the girls there. Scotland Yard, as an address, would catch any inquisitive eye. So he called on Wilkinson, who promised to post the letter at the Junction, whence, by the way, it would reach London that evening—a not immaterial strand in the tangled skein of events.

Wilkinson was lyrical in his account of the overnight call at Greystones.

"I got Mr. Hick down to the gate," he said, "an' he was that upset about the rug that he coughed up a fiver. So, here's your two quid, sir. I can't take your good money an' his as well."

Colquhoun made no protest. His village friend had not done so badly out of the blaze.

"Did he volunteer any explanation?" he inquired.

"No, sir. I thought it best not to show any knowledge of the chemical, but *he* understood all right, and was mainly anxious that no more should be said. I thought you meant something of the kind."

"Certainly I did. If it is spoken of in the village, take care you blame me."

It was a fine morning. The weather report in the country paper told of heavy rain in the south and south-west, but the east coast justified its honest though little-known repute of being the driest part of the British Isles, and a glorious sun flooded sea and land with prodigal splendour.

The visitor was evidently expected at Greystones. The lodge-keeper actually awaited him. Marita appeared on the drive. She was wearing a tweed costume, with woollen stockings and brown brogues.

"Uncle says he is very much obliged to you for acting as my banker yesterday," she cried gaily. "Here

are your ten pounds! And he was pleased to approve of my purchases. If I'm a good girl I shall be sent to London later with a cash credit sufficient to fill half-a-dozen trunks."

Then, conscious apparently that she had said something better left unsaid, she went on hurriedly:

"Of course, that is all moonshine. It would be silly to have dozens of frocks here, and ring the changes on them for my own amusement."

Colquhoun knew perfectly well that Mr. Gleave had promised Rita she would have *carte blanche* in selecting her trousseau. He rattled out the first banality he could think of.

"I have read somewhere," he said, "that women do not dress to attract men but to annoy other women."

Rita, of course, took the point seriously.

"That may be true of married women, and, to a lesser extent, of unmarried ones. But if I had a young man, as the housemaids put it, I would certainly want to wear my best bib and tucker when he was due to call. Some old fool of a poet said that beauty unadorned is adorned the most. *He* may have thought so, but the beauty wouldn't."

"That's rank heresy. You must read 'The Seasons.' You will find then that Thomson talks of 'loveliness', not of 'beauty', and that the context affects the sense of a line invariably misquoted."

"Oh, crikey!" cried the girl, genuinely surprised. "I had no idea you were a literary person."

"I'm not. I'll give the game away. Once I spent three months in a frontier post across the Indus, and the only book in the place was Thomson's 'Poetic Works', left there by some poor blighter who had gone West. I had nothing else to read. I know whole pages by heart. But, fear not! I shall not mar a perfect day by quoting."

In a large household the butler is never seen at

breakfast; Mr. Hick put in an appearance when the two young people were ready for the boating trip.

"I hear you ought to have good fishing, sir," he said, in his blandly agreeable way. "Some of the men on the yacht have seen several shoals of mackerel already. We shall be glad of a score or so out of your catch."

"That's all very well, Mr. Hick," said Colquhoun. "I hope we pull in your score. What I really want to know now is where you get such wonderful bacon? I just remember it ten years ago, but not a rasher of the kind have I seen in England since I came home until this morning."

"Very likely, sir. Our bacon is cured specially for us by a Norfolk factory."

When an opportunity offered, Colquhoun ascertained from Rita that Mr. Gleave never touched bacon. An extraordinary household, if ever there were one!

A well-found yawl, with two hands, was lying in the harbour. She had a small cabin, and an auxiliary engine, too, so was independent of the wind, if need be. Colquhoun's acquaintance of the inn was not on board, which showed that he was a man of tact. The local fishermen knew their business, and, long before anyone's thoughts turned to a well-filled luncheon basket, even a pair of amateurs had hauled in over a hundred fish.

Rita voted then that they should sail toward the Lincolnshire coast.

"I have seen it so often," she said, "and it looks like a dim fairyland. I would love to watch it opening up into reality."

With a south-westerly breeze this was quite possible. Within a couple of hours they could distinguish the outlines of the cliffs and dunes, and see the trim houses studding the shore or clustered in pretty Skegness away to the north.

"I'm satisfied now," sighed the girl when the boat

put about, and the solitary hump of Greystones showed, in its turn, as a loftier smear of blue on the long, low line which was Norfolk. "There are real people here, and green farms and white roads. I suppose all England, and nearly all the world, looks just like that if one could wander at will and see things."

Her indefinite longings were pathetic. Colquhoun realised suddenly that she was a strangely attractive creature, a trifle exotic, perhaps, but essentially feminine and eminently desirable. She recalled the Psalmist's description of the King's daughter, whose lips were like a thread of scarlet, with temples like a piece of pomegranate within her locks. She looked somewhat more in the English picture in her present garb. Her high colouring and brilliant eyes were not of Britain, but she struck a note of originality because of them, and the exceeding shapeliness of her limbs had been in evidence more than once when she sprang to clear a foresail or put a knee on the side of the boat in her eagerness to haul in a fish. He found himself wondering why this quite charming girl had been flung at his head, as it were, since it was impossible to construe her guardian's attitude differently. The man would be a crass idiot, too, who failed to see that Rita herself, despite her vehement disclaimer of the previous day, was by no means unwilling now to lend herself to the scheme. The object of this singular quest took care not to look at her while such notions were jostling in his brain, but the girl surprised the introspective gleam in his eyes, and almost startled him by saying:

"A penny for your thoughts, Arthur!"

"I was doubting," he answered, rather too quickly. "Does distance really lend enchantment to the view?"

"A nice reply to make to a female slave who was just considering whether your lordship would like a cup of tea. What does it mean exactly?"

The two were seated on the deck forward of the

mast. The hissing of a pressure oil-lamp indicated that a kettle was being boiled. On this local craft, at least, no wireless bogey sealed their lips. They were free to talk as they listed, yet not a word had they exchanged all day as to the mysteries or foibles of Greystones and its principal inmate.

"Of course, it is demoralising to have to admit that I was not thinking of you," said Colquhoun. "And it would not be wholly true. I was asking myself what on earth, or sea, am I doing here? Three days ago I started out from a squalid lodging-house just off the Edgware-road to book my passage for some part of Western America. Yet, here I am! Rather magical, isn't it?"

"Why is Mr. Gleave interested in *you?*" said she suddenly.

"I absolutely do not know."

"Yet he is. I don't profess to understand him, but, for some reason or another, he is tremendously anxious to befriend you. I am sure of that. He came to see me when I returned last evening, and seemed quite pleased that we had such a pleasant outing. At least, *I* had, so I took a chance in guessing that you, too, enjoyed it, except, of course, for your clash with Lady Weybourne and her niece."

"I enjoyed that at the time, I regret to say, though I see now I was in the wrong."

"Surely the girl was rude?"

"She simply seized the opportunity which my foolishness provided."

"She is sweetly pretty, don't you think?"

"I do, and she is not unaware of the fact herself."

"She looks frightfully aristocratic."

"Maybe that explains her attitude. Blue blood freezes more easily than red."

"I must remember that. Uncle loves an epigram."

"Did you happen to mention the incident when you saw him last night?"

"No. Naturally I told him we met the Viscountess. But I said nothing about your little scrap."

"I am glad of that. Personally, I would prefer that he heard nothing of it. The mere recital would revive disagreeable memories. If Lady Weybourne likes to make a fuss it is her affair, not mine."

A summons to tea was welcome—to Colquhoun, at any rate. He felt that Marita could hardly fail to try and worm the truth out of him, and it struck him as most unfair that such an impressionable girl should have her mind besmirched by the story of a tragedy which, after sinking into oblivion for eleven long years, had now been brought back to active and uncanny life.

For that was what his present adventure amounted to. Had not his father been stricken down during that fatal quarrel in May, 1914, he, Arthur Colquhoun, would most certainly not be the guest at this moment of a member of the Gleave family. It was all very well to throttle his dislike of an almost impossible situation by pretending that he was acting, in some sense, as an agent of Scotland Yard. His meeting with Sir Maurice Gleave and its dramatic outcome seemed, indeed, to imply something inevitable, some working of occult forces to which an ordinary man could only yield. But, in plain fact, Francis Gleave's advertisement for "Captain Arthur Colquhoun, late Indian Army," had not the slightest connection with the St. James's Park episode on the evening of the Drawing-room parade to the Palace. The two things were entirely separate. Admittedly, the advertisement was the indirect outcome of Sir Maurice Gleave's release from some convict settlement, and that consideration should not fail to carry weight with the son of the man Sir Maurice had killed. Before the yawl touched the steps sunk in the west pier of Greystones' harbour Colquhoun had decided to

send a telegram early next morning asking Scotland Yard if there was any good reason why he should remain longer in Keynham.

Mr. Hick awaited the return of the fishing party. His manner was less placid than usual. He spoke almost sharply.

"Mr. Gleave was worried, Miss Pereira, when he saw your boat go so far out to sea," he said. "He understood you were fishing, not cruising."

"Did Mr. Gleave ask you to tell me that?" demanded Rita.

"No, miss. Oh, no. I merely thought you would like to know what he said."

"Exactly. I am sure he will discuss the matter with me personally if he thinks fit By the way, will you kindly select what fish you want, and let the boatmen have the remainder?"

The butler's rather florid features reddened under the girl's quiet rebuke, but he tried to make amends.

"I really think, miss," he said deferentially, "that Mr. Gleave was only anxious because of the distance to be covered if the weather changed, and the barometer is falling rather rapidly. . . . I have a message for you, Captain Colquhoun. Mr. Gleave hopes you will be free to lunch here tomorrow. He wished me to tell you that the Viscountess Weybourne and her niece, Miss Hilton, have promised to come. I was to add that Mr. Gleave looks forward to having a long talk with you after their departure."

Much to Mr. Hick's surprise, Marita giggled frankly.

Colquhoun could not have been more astonished if the butler had peeled off his black coat and bade him "put 'em up" as a preliminary to a fistic combat on the pier. But he contrived to say calmly:

"You can assure Mr. Gleave that I shall be glad to keep both appointments."

"Funny, isn't it?" whispered the girl as they walked

toward the tunnel. "I wonder if the others know you will be there?"

"I am inclined to believe they are invited tomorrow for that very reason."

"But, why?"

"That I cannot guess. Within twenty-four hours I shall be older and wiser."

"What a scream! Perhaps Miss Hilton may behave better if you apologise."

"The last thing in the world I would dream of doing."

"Oh, you never can tell. You were beginning to weaken at tea-time. Sometimes I doubt whether my fond uncle is as clever as he thinks."

Marita Pereira's pretty head held brains. Her hearer did not quite catch the drift of that remark, but the girl herself felt its precise bearing on her matrimonial prospects. If Mr. Francis Gleave wanted a rather agreeable young man to fall in love with his ward he was taking an unnecessary risk in introducing a possible interloper. Rita might be young and inexperienced; she had the intuitive knowledge of her sex that like appeals to like. According to that standard, Evelyn Mary Hilton, blue-eyed, brown-haired, white of skin and pure of race as Colquhoun himself, must prove a serious rival to one in whose veins ran the half-Moorish blood of Portugal. Why could not that silly old man leave well enough alone? She wanted to shake him until his teeth chattered. Then he might learn to mind his own business!

CHAPTER X

THE SHADOWS DEEPEN

After dinner, being disinclined for the chatter of the bar-parlour, where his lightest word would be treasured and probably distorted in the common stock of village gossip, Colquhoun went out, meaning to have an uninterrupted hour with the policeman. But Wilkinson was on night duty, and would not be home before two o'clock, his wife said.

Heavy clouds were banked in the west, and the humid air foretold an almost certain downpour. Still, there was a chance of a couple of hours' respite, so a somewhat restless young man took the high road to Norwich, meaning to turn off by a lane he had noticed the previous day, and, in all likelihood, find a connecting link with the eastward coast road—that which passed Greystones. He ought to have consulted a map, so was luckier than he deserved, because the lane might have led him a pretty dance. In the result, a five mile walk completed the circuit.

He was nearing the junction of the two roads, and the lights of the railway were glimmering ahead, when a motor-car overtook him, passing with a silent swiftness that puzzled him considerably. Modern improvements in the internal combustion engine, with something near perfection in mechanical design, have reduced locomotive noise to a minimum. But this conveyance was ghost-like in its transit. Literally, all he heard was the swish of displaced air and the stealthy whirr of the tires.

Then he remembered that there were yet in exist-

ence some few cars driven by electricity stored in secondary batteries. Such vehicles were generally regarded, however, as practicable only in towns and populous suburbs. Their weight, and the difficulty of recharging the batteries when exhausted, had always precluded their use in a country district. Yet here was one in a remote part of Norfolk! A curious survival, he thought it.

He had been in no danger. The car carried powerful search-lights, and a gong had clanged a warning. A uniformed chauffeur was driving, and there were no visible passengers. The man might have been Brook, who took Rita and him to Norwich, but this was a mere fleeting impression. Certainly it savoured of Francis Gleave's freakishness that he should possess a speedy and smart-looking automobile of an obsolete type brought thoroughly up to date by its owner's science as an electrician. Colquhoun knew now, of course, that Greystones held marvels in wireless equipment which were not at the command of either the broadcasting companies or the military authorities. And it was but a step from some magical induction coil to a super-efficient secondary battery. What an oddity this half-caste Gleave was! What a strange life he led! And, viewed from any reasonable standpoint, how purposeless!

Colquhoun watched the car's tail-light flitting along a winding road for nearly half a mile. Then it vanished suddenly, and, as the station lay about there, it was probable that the simple purpose of the journey was to meet a train. Everything connected with Greystones, however, had an atmosphere of unreality if not of downright suspicion, so he could not help asking himself who the belated visitor might be, since Marita Pereira had not spoken of any guest expected that night. But her knowledge, or lack of it, counted for little in the scheme of things where her guardian was

concerned. He would not consider her for a moment in planning matters to suit his own convenience.

Colquhoun was in no hurry. He determined to wait a few minutes and see what happened, as he heard a train approaching from the direction of Norwich. It stopped, went on again; soon he saw the glare of the returning car.

It was possible, of course, that the chauffeur had noticed and recognised the solitary pedestrian as he passed. In that case, cover was advisable. Colquhoun dodged behind a tree with a clump of briars in front. He thought of creating a slight obstacle by breaking off some leafy branches and piling them in the middle of the road, a trick which would compel any fast-moving vehicle to slow down; he abandoned the notion the next second. Any such ruse would point directly to him if the driver had discovered his identity already.

Sheer luck came to his aid. A market gardener's cart, laden with produce which would probably go to Norwich by an early train, came out from the by-road at the very moment the car approached his hiding-place. Two draught-horses, harnessed in tandem, could not help taking a wide turn, and the motor was compelled to stop until the more cumbrous vehicle drew in to its proper side of the road. Colquhoun, therefore, made certain that the limousine now held an occupant—a man, wearing a cloth cap, with ears and chin shrouded in the high collar of a heavy coat.

The driver of the market cart muttered some words of apology, and the chauffeur said:

"That's all right, mate!"

So it *was* Brook. Colquhoun felt quite elated because his earlier deductions had been correct.

Thenceforth he trudged some three miles, or more. It was fully an hour before he found himself opposite Greystones. It was then close on ten o'clock—the set

time for cutting off all communications between the house and the outer world.

The weather yet held. Fitful gusts of wind and an increasing scurry of clouds across the moon told of rain being very near. But the 'Fisherman's Rest' was not far away, and a wetting would have no ill consequences, so Colquhoun halted and surveyed the house and grounds through the iron gates.

There was no light in the lodge, but several windows in Greystones itself told of people being astir. Two on the first floor, on the south-eastern corner, might easily belong to the secret wireless room of which Marita had spoken. Another, in the opposite wing, might be the girl's own apartment. Higher up, scattered lights suggested the servants' quarters.

Colquhoun, of course, had no means of knowing whether the electric car had come out again, assuming it had actually gone back to Greystones in the first instance. So far as he could judge, though the dense foliage prevented accurate observation, the living-rooms on the ground floor were in darkness.

He waited many minutes, hardly knowing why, but yielding to that state of nervous exaltation induced by darkness and silence when the mind is in tune for mystery and romance. Then, glancing at his radium-figured wrist-watch, he saw that the hour was past ten o'clock, and realised that Mr. Knyvitt would soon be locking up his premises for the night.

So he began to fill his pipe, meaning to have a final smoke before turning in, when he was more startled than any good soldier should confess to being by a low-pitched voice directly behind him.

"Take my tip, captin," it said, "an' don't strike a match here! You may be spotted."

"That you, Wilkinson?" said Colquhoun, quietly enough, for he had long ago acquired the art of keep-

ing his utterance under control no matter how rapidly his pulse might be beating.

"Yes, sir. Sorry if I med you jump. You took *me* by surprise, too. I wondered who it was at first, stoppin' at the gate after comin' along the coast. If you'd like a bit of a crack, walk on down the road, an' I'll join you. The lodge-keeper seems to have gone to bed, but you never can tell—he may be peepin' through a blind now."

Colquhoun strolled leisurely a good hundred yards toward the village, until, in fact, he was clear of the western boundary wall of the Greystones estate. Wilkinson appeared from a gate in a field on the opposite side of the road.

"I can do with a smoke meself," he admitted. "If we stand under the lee of the wall they simply can't see us."

"But it's a queer state of affairs when one should be chary of showing a light in the high road at ten o'clock on a summer's evening," said Colquhoun.

"It's not exactly that, sir. I wouldn't ha' said a word if you hadn't pulled up right in front of the house. The fact is my orders are that I must avoid bein' seen. It's the same for the man who relieves me at two o'clock. He has to clear out from here by five, but remain in the village till eight. There are six of us on the job, so we get one night in three."

"What's it all about? Are you free to tell?"

"We don't know ourselves, sir, an' that's a fact. We just report what happens."

"How about tonight, for instance?"

"A car, very quietly driven, came out about half past eight. It returned at 9.10, so I suppose it went to the Junction. The lodge-keeper was evidently on the look-out, because he had the gate open at the right moment, an' it swep' in before I could see whether there was anyone inside or not."

Colquhoun chuckled. He had been more fortunate. He made P. C. Wilkinson a present of the information gleaned at the cross road.

"Is the visitor there for the night, do you think?" he went on.

"Well, the car went to the garage at the back of the house, and the lights disappeared from the door and in the hall. Judgin' by the time the other lights were turned on, the newcomer was taken straight to a room on the first floor at the east end."

"The wireless room," said Colquhoun incautiously.

"The what, sir?"

"Isn't that the room in which the wireless set is installed?"

"Oh, most likely. Of course, I can't say. I've bin stationed here six years, and I do believe I could write on the back of a postage stamp all I know about Greystones."

"How long have the police been watching the place?"

"Four nights, sir. I kicked off, an' this is my second spell."

"Tell me to shut up if I'm too inquisitive. Has anything actually happened during that time?"

"Not a peep out of any livin' being till that car kem out tonight. An' I wouldn't have much to say about that if you hadn't turned up, captin."

Colquhoun smoked in silence for a full minute. Then a thought struck him.

"By the way," he said, "does Mr. Gleave's electric launch, or yacht, rather, go to sea often?"

"I hardly know, sir. Unless some local boat is passing she would not be seen. She can go out or come in just as she likes in that hidden harbour."

"I wonder if she is there now?"

"Ah, it 'ud be interestin' to find out, sir. There's on'y one point on the cliff outside Greystones itself from which one can look down into the ravine an' see

both piers, but, unfortunately, I mustn't move away from the main road. Indeed, if you weren't here, I'd be stuck behind the hedge in front of the lodge now."

"I'm good at taking hints, Wilkinson," laughed Colquhoun. "Where is the point you speak of, and how can I reach it most easily?"

The policeman supplied ample directions. The undertaking implied a stiff climb and a long detour to avoid two almost impassable hedges, but Colquhoun started off. Three-quarters of an hour later he reported to Wilkinson that the yacht was not at her berth between the piers. By that time he was soaked to the skin, as the rain-storm had begun, and showed no sign of abating. Indeed, a sharp accompaniment of thunder and lightning had helped accurate observation by flooding the depths of the cleft with phenomenally clear electric flashes.

Mr. Knyvitt was sitting up, but Colquhoun explained his wanderings by night along unknown roads, so that the incident should not attract the landlord's attention unduly. He went straight to bed, feeling that, perhaps, his day had not been altogether wasted.

Next morning, the weather having improved, he sought his boatman acquaintance after breakfast, and went for a short sail along the coast, taking care to don a sou'-wester and oilskin coat lest the craft should be examined through a powerful telescope. The Greystones harbour was still empty. Of course, there was no knowing at what hour the yacht went to sea, but, if Rita reported no newcomer in the house, it was permissible to connect the arrival of a man by train with the vessel's departure.

"That's a smart craft Mr. Gleave has at command," he said to the boatman. "I have seen her three times close at hand during the past two days, but I couldn't quite make out her class. Is she oil-driven?"

"No, sir—electric," said the other.

"Yes, so I understand. But the power must be generated on board by oil or coal."

"That's as may be," came the evasive reply. "None of us hereabouts have ever seen a ton of coal or barrel of oil landed on the piers. Oil comes by road, an' plenty of it, but the men say it is unloaded at the power-house. Of course, there's nothing much in that. It's on'y a step to the pier through the tunnel."

A far-fetched suggestion of directional wireless passed through Colquhoun's mind, but he uttered no comment other than a non-committal one as to the trim lines of the vessel itself.

The luncheon-hour found him in the drawing-room of Greystones, where Mr. Gleave and Rita awaited him. His host was urbane as ever, but the girl looked a trifle pale and Colquhoun fancied there was a troubled expression in her eyes, an expression which, if he were not quite mistaken, she was making a valiant effort to conceal.

They were chatting unconcernedly about the fishing expedition when the Viscountess Weybourne and Miss Hilton were announced. Their visit was so inexplicable that Colquhoun was particularly alert to discover whether aunt and niece had any prior knowledge of his presence. But their manner was studiously correct. All three had met before, and the fact was tacitly accepted.

Indeed, Lady Weybourne, quite at her ease that day, went off at once into a description of the Drawing-room at which Evelyn Hilton was presented. She spoke as though Francis Gleave were well acquainted with the more eminent persons gathered in the Palace. Both she and Gleave used the familiar "Francis" and "Maud." They alluded to many of the great ones of the earth—of British earth, at any rate—in the same way. As a result, Colquhoun could only guess occasionally by inference the identity of some of the people

under discussion. Rita could hardly have recognised any of them.

When the fish was served Gleave asked the butler if it were not some of the previous day's spoil. This was the first of a series of subtle innuendoes that Rita and Colquhoun had been inseparable since the latter arrived on the scene. His air was so benignant and avuncular that Colquhoun found himself dreading lest a more or less open reference should be made to a prospective engagement!

He decided to end this purring and cooing by saying something which might produce fireworks. Lady Weybourne spoke of the storm overnight, and thus gave him his chance.

"By the way, Mr. Gleave," he said, "I took a long walk after dinner last evening. On the Norwich road I was passed by an electric car driven by a chauffeur whom I recognised as Brook, so I assumed the car was yours. It seemed to move with remarkable ease. It must run on a rather wonderful secondary battery."

"It does," agreed Gleave instantly. "Where did it overtake you?"

"At the junction of the high road and a lane about a mile and a half from Keynham."

"Ah. The gradient is slightly downhill there. I wish you could see that car climbing. It has a marvellous reserve of power. The next time Rita and you go joy-riding you must sample it, and learn for yourself what the East can do in applied science. You remember our discussion of the other day? When you find a battery weighing only two hundred pounds yielding a force equivalent to fifty miles an hour for two hours, with another battery in reserve which, in actual practice, is seldom called on, you will be compelled to admit that poor, neglected India may yet count among the nations."

"Is this battery an Indian invention, then?"

"Invention—no. Hardly that. An adaptation rather. How shall I describe it? A freeing of science from the trammels which Western conservatism has imposed."

Colquhoun laughed. He knew he was beaten by an adroit adversary.

"That is a score against me," he explained to the company at large. "I believe now that Mr. Gleave will lead us all out into the garden, and show us certain feats of Indian magic which I scoffed at as impossible."

"Did you get wet last night, Arthur?" said Rita suddenly. In her own way, she created the greater sensation.

"I certainly did," he said, well aware of the glances exchanged by aunt and niece. "Before passing this house I was soaked to the skin. My landlord thought I was lost. It was foolish to go wandering round the country by night, but your uncle sent such phenomenally good wine for my entertainment at the inn that I had to walk off the effect of the Burgundy I drank at dinner."

"Were you armed?" inquired Gleave.

"Armed, sir?" and Colquhoun's surprise now was certainly not feigned.

"Yes. If I were you I would not indulge in these late rambles. At this time of the year the coast roads are infested by a peculiarly noxious sort of tramp, who is ready to turn burglar or highway robber when the opportunity offers. I adopt drastic measures in self-defence. If one of those scoundrels tries to break in here he will get the shock of his life, and I speak literally. If he has a weak heart it will kill him, and then I may be in trouble with the law. But I'll risk that. My house is my castle, and I mean to hold it against all marauders."

"Oh, do tell us how, Mr. Gleave?" said Evelyn Hilton.

"Don't be horrid!" protested Lady Weybourne, who did not seem to like the turn taken by the conversation. "Rita, may I usurp your functions? I'm becoming quite a fresh-air fiend, and the weather man says we have more storms coming, so I grudge every fine hour spent indoors."

They all rose. Gleave did not excuse himself and retire. Perhaps it was hardly possible with Lady Weybourne there as his guest. He walked with her, and they promptly drew apart, so the three younger people had to entertain each other. It promised to be a difficult undertaking, Marita being distrait, Evelyn watchful and superciliously amused, and Colquhoun utterly at a loss to know how to stage any topic of common interest. But a somewhat remarkable incident dispersed the mists. The five were crossing a lawn, Lady Weybourne and Gleave leading, when a large tortoise-shell cat, which might have been stalking birds in a shrubbery, ran diagonally in front of the foremost pair. Instantly Gleave seemed to be possessed of a fiend. His face was convulsed with rage, his eyes glowed, the normal ivory-white tint of his skin changed to a greenish pallor, and his long-fingered, nervous hands became talons that clawed the air.

"What a misfortune!" he yelped in a queer staccato which Colquhoun knew at once to be the so-called "chee-chee" accent of the Eurasian. "To think that that beast should be here when I am unprepared!"

Whatever it was that he meant, his actions were significant. He made to pursue the cat in a curious crouching attitude, as though he were emulating the movement of some predatory animal of its own tribe. Rita ran to restrain him.

"Uncle!" she cried. "Don't be stupid! Come away! You cannot possibly overtake it now!"

The Viscountess, undeniably startled, nevertheless

went to the girl's assistance. Between them they succeeded in heading Gleave for the house.

"You are fated to find me in strange company, Miss Hilton," said Colquhoun, realising the folly of trying to ignore the peculiar scene they had just witnessed.

"I am fated to form part of the strange company, you mean," retorted the girl, whose humorously scornful glance was still following the trio making for the door.

"Put it as you wish, you and I are the onlookers, and it invariably falls to my lot to explain."

"Does it?"

"I think so. We are English. These others, that is to say, Gleave and his ward, are exotic. You really ought to understand that."

"One has eyes, and ears."

"Neither may be trustworthy. I told you the other day how I fell in with Sir Maurice Gleave. In a similarly fantastic way I was brought here—by an advertisement in a newspaper—and I was not in the place an hour before Miss Marita Pereira informed me that I was her chosen husband. I don't want to do her an injustice. She repudiated the notion—at first."

"She's an awfully nice girl. So the scheme grows more feasible as time passes, I suppose?"

"No. It revolts me. I have come to the conclusion that Mr. Francis Gleave has formed some far-fetched if philanthropic conceit of reparation being due by his family to mine. His half-brother killed my father. This girl has been left on his hands by some old-time friend. He will probably endow her suitably; if I were to marry her, the circle would be complete, and he left free to pursue the occult investigations which alone appeal to him. That is the only practical theory I have evolved. I cannot fall in with it. When I leave here today it will be to pack up, catch the next train to

London, and start for the Far West of America on the earliest possible date."

"But, why? You implied when we met in town that you were poor. Miss Pereira is quite charming. Wouldn't it be what people call 'a suitable match'? One hears of such things, even at my bread-and-butter age."

"You are entitled to the jibe," he said, turning and looking at her steadily. "We have met four times—five, if one counts our morning in Hyde Park as two separate occasions. I admit you have every reason to rate me by a low standard. But you are mistaken, Miss Hilton. I have been the victim of circumstances. I am not one to be allotted a bride and a competence at the will of some semi-lunatic. If ever I marry, which seems improbable at the moment, I shall pursue and capture my own bride. She may be haughty and alluring as you—she may be as difficult to attain—but she will be mine when won, and I shall know how to keep her once I hold her in my arms."

Evelyn paled a little, and her candid eyes fell, but she tried gallantly to retain her pose of critical aloofness.

"I think I remember you saying in Hyde Park that you were bewitched," she said. "I am beginning to think we all are! But, if I were in your place, I would not run away. You cannot be mesmerised into marrying anyone. At least, I am quite sure *I* couldn't. Here comes auntie. She looks dreadfully upset. Poor soul! She has become years older since that unfortunate meeting with Sir Maurice. How stupid to let such a man out of prison!"

Lady Weybourne approached. She no longer represented a caste. She was merely a frightened woman.

"The indoor servants are attending to Mr. Gleave," she said brokenly. "None of the gardeners seems to

realise what has happened. Will you find someone and get my car, Captain Colquhoun?"

He knew where the garage lay, so hurried off.

"Oh, my dear!" gasped her ladyship. "I am trembling all over. Francis is mad, quite mad! He is killing cats, and making the most frightful noises!"

"Killing cats!" repeated Evelyn. "Are there cats in the house? We saw none."

"I mean pretending to kill cats. Don't question me, or I shall scream. I won't come here again—ever. I shall die first."

Now, Maud, Viscountess Weybourne, was not of the common clay which exudes tears when pressure is applied. She was noted in her family and among her friends for being hard and unyielding. Something more than Francis Gleave's queer mania for destroying marauding cats had broken her nerve on that sunlit afternoon.

CHAPTER XI

THE NAVY TAKES A HAND

When the two ladies were whirled away in their limousine Colquhoun dawdled about a little in apparent hesitation near the front door. He was not irresolute, because his mind was made up, or he fancied it was, but he felt himself being caught in the meshes of an invisible though none the less deadly net; if he would break loose he must act with boldness and decision.

He wanted to take leave of Marita Pereira in orthodox fashion, but Greystones, both inside and out, was strangely deserted. No footman loitered in the hall, nor was there a gardener to be seen in any part of the grounds. Indeed, Francis Gleave's extraordinary pursuit of the cat seemed to be nothing new to the other members of the household; each and all, excepting Rita, had scuttled into hiding. Such an attitude was quite easily understood. Even in the Army one had to close one's eyes often enough to the foibles of those higher up.

Colquhoun did not care to enter one of the main rooms in search of a bell. After a full minute of thought he elected to offer an explanation at the lodge, because he had seen the gates opened for the passage of the car. And that is what he did.

"Convey my regrets to Miss Pereira for my departure without bidding her 'Goodbye,'" he said to the lodge-keeper. "Mr. Gleave is indisposed, I think, and she is looking after him. Please tell her I will write."

"Are you leaving Keynham, sir?" inquired the man,

not trying to conceal his surprise, since his orders with regard to Captain Colquhoun were directly at variance with what he was hearing now.

"Yes. I hope to catch a train for London this evening."

The ex-sailor saluted.

"I'll give Miss Pereira your message, sir," he said.

Among the many enigmas presented by this peculiar *ménage* none was more insoluble than the almost absurd contrast in all essentials between the owner and his staff. Hick, the butler, was true to type. The house servants, the Scotch gardeners, the chauffeur, the lodge-keeper, the men on the yacht, with one exception, the Madrassi steward, were exactly the sort of people one would meet in any pretentious mansion in any part of the United Kingdom. It was simply ludicrous to associate them with mystery and necromantic intrigue. One might as well suspect a City Alderman of being a burglar.

Rita had, of course, suggested a powerful reason for their silent loyalty—they were well paid. Nor should such service be deemed altogether rare in the British Isles. Colquhoun remembered being shown as a boy a solemn high-walled house in a London square where, he was told, dwelt a peer so disfigured by leprosy that phenomenal pains were taken to prevent any member of the general public from seeing him. Yet that unfortunate aristocrat never lacked a set of faithful and excellent domestics. Not from them did sensational disclosures reach the outer world.

The one real problem before Colquhoun was whether he should clear out of Keynham forthwith or await instructions from Scotland Yard. He elected in favour of the first course. He could report verbally in London. He had cultivated the habit of analysing his own motives with all possible detachment; so now, during a quiet stroll back to the village, he discovered that

Marita Pereira supplied the most powerful incentive to an early departure. He could not assist the girl in any practical way. Most certainly he would never marry her. To remain longer in the neighbourhood and be thrown daily into close association with her might be absolutely detrimental to her interests, such as they were, while under the control of a man like Gleave.

Following this analytical line, the young philosopher came inevitably to the question—why did he recoil so determinedly from the marriage project? Had Miss Evelyn Mary Hilton anything to do with this sudden distaste for another nice girl, one who, in addition to her good looks and lively manners, had a fair prospect of being well dowered?

He laughed grimly, but did not shirk the truth. If love at first sight were not a pleasing fiction of poets and romancers he was sure he had met the one girl in the world for him that evening in St. James's Park. Oddly enough, though he did not know it at the time he knew now that she then became his chosen lady. He was aware, moreover, that such a fantastic conceit was no new thing. In his spare hours a reader of poetry, he recalled, with a taste of bitterness in his soul, Herrick's simple verse:

> There is a lady sweet and kind,
> Was never face so pleas'd my mind;
> I did but see her passing by,
> And yet, love her till I die.

He quoted the words aloud; it only needed the sound of his own voice that he should realise the absurdity of such moonings.

"It certainly is high time I was off," he said to himself. "Less than a week ago I might have been regarded as a sensible sort of chap, yet here am I today vapouring like a spring poet enamoured of his first golden-haired affinity."

He stepped out, unconsciously quickening his pace. Half an hour to pack and pay his bill, five minutes to write a letter, and then a 'bus or some other conveyance to the railway. Mr. Knyvitt damped his ardour a little, however.

"No train till 5.30, sir," he announced. "The 'bus passes half an hour earlier. . . . I hope you're not leavin' us, captin."

"Yes. I want to be in London tonight. There's a chance I may be detained by a telegram, but that is rather improbable."

Though Colquhoun never knew why he added that tag, he was glad of it when, his baggage ready and letter to Rita written and sealed, chauffeur Brook brought a note from Mr. Gleave. It read:

My dear Arthur Colquhoun—It is quite likely that you have grasped already the true inwardness of my absurd behaviour today, since you know something of my habits. Instead of resting as usual I forced myself to entertain two rather difficult guests, and paid the penalty by a nervous breakdown. I ought to have shown more sense, because I, more than most, am a slave to routine. Of course, I brought Lady Weybourne and her niece here for Rita's sake. She is far too thoroughly cut off from the companionship of social equals of her own sex. Another time, however, I must leave the entertaining to her capable hands.

The incident must have been awkward for you, but it was worse for Rita. Won't you help to restore matters to the normal by dining with her tonight? Let me send the car for you at seven. A verbal message to Brook will suffice. He will take you back to the hotel about ten. I fear I cannot see you until tomorrow, or next day, should you young people elect for boating or motoring while the weather is fine, as it now promises to be. With my very real apologies for a stupid collapse, I am,

Yours sincerely,

FRANCIS GLEAVE.

Colquhoun was in the smoking-room when a maid-servant handed him this unexpected missive. He was alone—free, therefore, to consider it at leisure without attracting attention by any marked hesitancy about answering it. In very truth, he was puzzled to decide what to do for the best. He was beginning to hate the atmosphere of Greystones, and knew quite well that it was playing with fire to indulge in these constant meetings with Marita. If he yielded now he could hardly avoid staying on in Keynham the next day, and the next. What was the prudent course? To excuse himself, he was sure. Possibly he could hire a car in the village and leave forthwith for Norwich. Yet, in sober earnest, why was he running away? It would be boorish to bolt in a panic after entrusting to the chauffeur the note he had already written and an even curter one to Gleave. The whole situation was most perplexing. He felt like a man lost in one of those hedge-girt mazes found in many public gardens; he had just glimpsed what seemed to be an avenue of escape only to find himself in a worse entanglement, and there was no friendly park-keeper mounted on a platform to shout instructions as to the right path. The deuce take those Scotland Yard detectives! Why, at least, had they not sent some word of advice? He was in Norfolk at their request. Furneaux could talk like a super-educated foc's'l parrot in London. Why was he silent now? That big man, too, Mr. Winter, seemed to be an eminently sensible chap. Surely, in view of the importance which the police themselves attached to affairs at Greystones they might have sensed some of his difficulties. It was fortunate his thoughts took that turn. He remembered the hapless constables whose duty it was to watch Gleave's house all night and every night, yet here was he—an officer on the staff, so to speak—trying to shirk his job.

He seized a pen and wrote:

Dear Mr. Gleave—I'm glad you have recovered. I don't know much about nerves, but believe a whiskey and soda or a glass of good wine may be an excellent sedative. If one is not effective, take two. Hick will certainly be able to give you the right dose.

I'll be delighted to dine with Miss Pereira this evening.

Yours faithfully,

ARTHUR COLQUHOUN.

Then he tore up the letter meant for Rita.

He was tempted to put a question or two to Brook, but resisted the impulse on the ground of unfairness. He was glad of that when he read a folded scrap of paper which the man thrust into his hand before the car started. Some few pencilled sentences were eloquent. They ran:

Sir—You have forgotten, of course, if you ever knew, that you and I were in the trenches together at Chapelle d'Armentières—same battalion but different platoons. I heard how you got your commission. So I want you to understand things. I am paid £7 a week, with board and lodging. I have an easy job, and can see my wife and two children nearly every day unless some long run is ordered. I don't suppose I'll ever get another berth like it, but the main condition is that I say nothing to nobody. Not a bad tip for lots of other people. Please burn this.

Yours truly,

WILLIAM BROOK.

The car was still in sight, so Colquhoun struck a match, applied it to the paper, and lighted his pipe. As he half expected, the motor-horn tooted a warning at some imaginary pedestrian. From that instant the chauffeur and he became good friends, because one can always appreciate a man who is *namak-halal,* "faithful to his salt," as the expressive Eastern phrase has it.

Brook smiled agreeably when he called at "The

Fisherman's Rest" later. His salute was that of the regiment.

"By the way," said Colquhoun, "unless the weather changes I would prefer to walk back after dinner."

"Right you are, sir, but would you mind telling Mr. Hick that about half past nine?"

The request was significant. If the car did not leave the house as arranged there would be inquiries. Of course, that particular incident might happen anywhere. At Greystones it was part of the day's duty, a trivial instance of Francis Gleave's craze to be kept informed of everything that went on within the bounds of the estate and of a good deal that took place outside.

Mr. Knyvitt, well pleased that he had not lost his solitary lodger, since telegrams about the mackerel had failed to bring any response that day, watched the car speeding down the road. To him came P. C. Wilkinson, chewing his chin-strap, thumbs stuck in belt.

"The captin dinin' at the Hall?" inquired the latter.

"Yes. He was hookin' it this afternoon, but the shuffer caught him with a letter."

"Hookin' it, was he? You don't tell me. That's odd."

"What's odd?"

"Well, that he should be axed to Greystones of an evenin'. First time such a thing has happened in my time here."

"That's true, too. I hadn't given a thought to it. But things are wakin' up there. Two ladies were at luncheon today."

Wilkinson breathed more freely. He had managed to dodge an explanation of an incautious comment.

"Someone said it was Lady Weybourne's car," he admitted.

"Oh, was it? That's the milk in the cocoa-nut. Mr. Francis an' old Brankshome were thick as thieves afore

the viscountcy came along. The friendship slackened off a bit durin' the War, an' then his lordship died."

"Well, the captin will have a good dinner, I hear. Salmon an' ducks an' green peas were rushed from Norwich by the 5.10. I hope he enjoys it. He's a nice young fellow by all accounts."

"One of the best. Comes into the bar an' has his crack with the rest of us. . . . I'm just takin' a turn in the garden. P'raps you'll be strollin' round that way?"

"In about five minutes," agreed Wilkinson, suddenly aware of a peculiar thirstiness.

Colquhoun waited a little while in the drawing-room before Rita joined him. Her eyes looked tired, but she was charmingly gowned in a simple dinner dress of yellow georgette, with a waist-band and hem of a similar material tinted orange. She wore grass-green stockings and green shoes. Happily, the man caught the colour-scheme at a glance.

"Daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares
To take the winds of March with beauty,"

he quoted.

The quip brought a smile.

"My costume is two months out of date," she said, "but I like it. If I had put on the Rose du Barri dress my maid prepared for me I would resemble a tongue of flame. We dark-haired saffron-skinned girls have to be careful what we wear in artificial light. Hence the delay. Dinner is nearly ready. Mr. Hick is bringing you a cocktail."

Colquhoun thought he might venture on a question.

"I hope Mr. Gleave is really better?" he said.

"Oh, he was all right in half an hour. It was most

unfortunate about that cat. He loathes cats. He cannot bear, he says, to see them torturing birds."

"I'm inclined to back him up in that, though big birds are just as cruel to little ones. The law of the jungle is quite merciless. I don't think it does an atom of good for anyone to be over-sensitive about it."

"He is not, actually, though that sounds contradictory, doesn't it? He saw me before I went to dress, and was mainly concerned as to tomorrow's festivities. He wants us to take a long run in that electric car. He is a firstrate weather prophet, by the way, and asked me to tell you that the air-humidity is decreasing rapidly. Will you come to breakfast?"

Colquhoun laughed whole-heartedly.

"This is true hospitality," he vowed. "Here am I accepting breakfast before the gong has sounded for dinner."

"You will hear no gong here, I trust," smiled Rita. "The sound of a gong means fire. We have a fire-drill once a week, and it is no make-believe business, either. I have to be shot down a canvas pipe from the second storey; it was a long time before I got used to it."

The two entered the dining-room, where a small table had been cunningly disposed near an open window—that is to say, near a window of which some of the higher panes were a'slant. But the blinds were not drawn, and a shaded electric lamp did not hinder a twilight view over the gardens and the distant hills.

"May I talk of cats?" said Colquhoun, rather daringly. But he wanted to note the effect of the remark on Hick, and was rewarded, for the butler's hand shook while pouring out some Chablis.

"Certainly, if you are interested in them," said the girl.

"If cats are taboo at Greystones I wonder how they get here—that is all."

"They come from the village and neighbouring farms.

You see, the place swarms with birds, owing to the fruit."

"Don't your gardeners object to the birds?"

"The trees are well netted, but the blackbirds and finches like to look at the cherries, even though they cannot get at them. Besides, all unsound fruit is thrown to them."

"Splendid. It sounds like Darwin's clover theory."

"What is that?"

"He holds that the old maids of England are responsible for the high quality of British clover. Bumble-bees fertilise the clover plants; field mice devour bumble-bees: cats eat field mice: old maids keep cats; therefore, the more old maids the richer crops of clover."

"Is that a scientific joke?"

"I cannot imagine Darwin joking about anything."

"Is the wine to your liking, sir?" inquired the butler severely.

"Top-hole. And, a word in your ear, Mr. Hick, I hope you shook enough of that cocktail for two?"

The man had to grin, and mutter something about a recipe he got from a West Indian planter. When he was temporarily out of earshot Rita murmured:

"I'm glad you said that. I detest that oily person. He humours uncle in all his queer ways. I believe—but let us discuss anything but cats for the rest of the evening."

Colquhoun told her of certain little-known Neapolitan ballads he had picked up during an enforced stay of three days in Naples. His home-coming ship had suffered a slight breakdown, and a mandolin party came on board each evening. Their leader had given him at least six songs seldom if ever heard in England.

"I want to know more about that," said Rita, looking him squarely in the eye. "You may be able to humbug

me with your Darwinian theories, but Italian music, of every sort, is my long suit."

"Good! Ever heard of a song called 'Non sei più tu'?"

"N-no."

"I'll sing it for you after dinner."

Which he did, having a good baritone voice, and being able to strum his own accompaniments. He discovered that Rita was an all-round musician. She played and sang with equal ease and skill. They had a thoroughly enjoyable evening, and neither man nor woman gave the least heed to the wireless installation which occupied a corner of the room. At five minutes to ten, Colquhoun found he had forgotten completely to acquaint Mr. Hick with his intention of walking to the hotel. He explained matters in the hall, however, and had the waiting car sent to the garage. Weather permitting, he would be at Greystones next morning at nine.

He was sure he had left Rita happier and more contented. The more friendly they became the less likelihood was there of any deeper feeling developing on her part. Such, at least, was his artless belief, for a man is always ready to be convinced that a woman thinks as he does, especially when such conviction makes matters easier for himself.

It was a fine night, almost cloudless, with a moon beyond the first quarter just rising in the east. There was only a light breeze, so the overcoat he carried was not necessary. He wore no hat. It was a joy to fill a pipe, despite his host's quite perfect Havanas, a debased taste which none but the true pipe-smoker will appreciate.

An electric lamp glowed unexpectedly as he neared the gate, and the lodge-keeper appeared.

"Do they switch on that light from the house?" inquired Colquhoun.

"Yes, sir. It's my signal that someone is going out," said the man.

"Mr. Gleave is wasted here," laughed Colquhoun. "He ought to be President of the Board of Trade."

"I think, sir, he's all right where he is. . . . Good night, sir—and thank you."

"These lads are well trained," mused the soldier, when the iron gates closed almost noiselessly behind him. "They all say the right thing. Money must be a greater factor in human affairs than I ever imagined it. What a game! That gate-keeper is probably far better off than a demobbed officer, yet I cheerfully tip him half a crown, and he as cheerfully takes it. I'm on the wrong tack. When I reach California I'll grab a job in a hotel."

Musing on life's inequalities he hardly noticed a small, trimly-built man, with a straw hat tilted over his eyes, approaching from the direction of the village. He had not forgotten, of course, that a hidden policeman must have seen him leaving Greystones, but, being a stranger, it was out of the question to hail him, even if any good purpose could be served thereby.

The oncoming little man halted in the middle of the road, the two being then opposite the gate which P. C. Wilkinson had climbed just twenty-four hours earlier.

"Good evening, Captain Colquhoun," said the other in an astonishingly deep, strong voice. "You are now, I take it, strolling back to your inn, replete with good food, good wine and good music—salmon, duck and green peas, I hear, supplemented by the rarest vintages of France. Yet you want to fly from such blessings! How strange!"

Colquhoun, probably intentionally, was given time by this harangue to collect his wits.

"You must be either the devil or Mr. Furneaux," he retorted.

"Far be it from me to ape the Prince of Darkness,"

said the detective, using his natural squeaky, high-pitched utterance. "I'm glad you have recognised me, however. The adroit cop lurking behind that hedge will now be relieved of doubt as to my good standing with the people of this realm. He is acquainted with my name, but, lacking a reliable witness, he would never accept me as a famous sleuth."

A tall, dark form loomed into sight behind the bars of the gate.

"That you, Captain Colquhoun?" it inquired huskily. "I want a word with you, but couldn't very well hail you while this—this gentleman from London was standin' in the road."

"Well put, Robert!" cackled Furneaux. "Don't get shirty if I chaff you. Buffoon that I am you will soon learn to love me. Didn't Wilkinson tell you an hour ago that I was a scream?"

Colquhoun went to the gate.

"What is it, constable?" he said.

The policeman was ill at ease, in a sense, but did not shirk his task.

"It was on'y to tell you, sir, that Mr. Furneaux was here. Wilkinson thought you ought to be prepared like. But Mr. Furneaux came down the road before you turned up. Though I guessed him all right I thought it best to wait and see if you two knew one another."

"In other words, my gallant captain, if you think there are any flies on the Norfolk County Constabulary you are jolly well mistaken," put in Furneaux. "I have met these brave boys before, and came to the conclusion that——"

The world will never know Furneaux's opinion of his colleagues in that part of England, for the peace of the summer night was broken by the heavy thud of a distant gun. Always a startling sound, the present gen-

eration of Britons can never forget its ominous and sinister significance.

The three men listened, but there was no repetition. An owl hooted, and a dog barked, and some pheasants in a wood half a mile away chuckled in alarm. These noises died down quickly.

"A man-o'-war signallin' some vessel to heave-to," explained the policeman.

"Yes," agreed Colquhoun. "A 6-inch gun firing blank—probably five miles away."

"Are you sure about the size of the gun?" was Furneaux's unexpected question.

"Fairly sure. Of course, I only know the 5.7, and the navy uses a 6., but the difference is slight—a good deal less than half an inch in the calibre."

At that moment the windows which Marita had said were those of the "wireless" room at Greystones blazed into sudden light, which was dimmed as blinds were drawn rapidly.

"That bang seems to have stirred things up in the palace," said Furneaux. "You and I, Colquhoun, had better reach the shelter of the inn. I'm a timid little fellow, and shooting at night always alarms me. Besides, our friend here should hurry back to his post. There may be something doing, and it would be quite embarrassing if the headlights of a fast-moving car dwelt on us three deep in consultation. It won't help if we are seen together anywhere. At this hour, and in this section of the road, it would cause a premature explosion."

The policeman vanished. The others walked a full hundred yards in silence.

"My pipe is out," then said Colquhoun. "Is there any reason why I shouldn't strike a match?"

"None that would appeal to you," was the dry reply. "I always register my condemnation of the vicious and conscience-dulling habit of smoking. Beyond that,

there is nothing. Blaze away, and reveal our whereabouts to all and sundry."

"Ha!" said Colquhoun. "Stage stuff, I think, seeing that all and sundry know I am on my way home. Still, I would hate to illuminate your face, so my pipe can wait."

CHAPTER XII

WEATHER FORECAST: "SOME SQUALLS"

FURNEAUX had reached "The Fisherman's Rest" from London by the train Colquhoun took several days earlier. He came in the rôle of a mackerel-fisher, and had already won renown in the bar-parlour by reason of the astounding methods he advocated for use in that well-established pastime.

"I know as much about mackerel as the average American knows about sole, which is nil," he explained now. "Nevertheless I recited several striking and original practices in vogue among the inhabitants of the Coromandel Islands, and a hearty-looking fellow—a close friend of yours, I was given to understand—nearly developed apoplexy."

"Ah! He has boats for hire."

"I guessed it. But he was too bemused to push his wares. Dazing the shoal with a burning-glass got him rattled. The lure of a painfully diseased ham slung in the middle of a globular net simply bowled him out. Have you ever heard of it?"

"No."

"Mackerel cannot resist it. They swarm madly through the meshes in such density that any net over five feet in diameter will burst before it can be hauled on board."

"Where are the Coromandel Islands?"

"I haven't the least notion. But I like the name. It suggests coral reefs, and white sands, and palm trees, with dusky beauties robed in garlands of flowers and broad smiles."

It being fine weather, and the inn perforce closed, a knot of Keynham folk still lingered in the village street. Men nudged each other when the two appeared. "That's him—the little 'un!" whispered one fellow. "It's a fair treat to 'ear 'im talk!" said another. "Knyvitt's snug won't begin to 'old tomorrer night's crowd."

"You have a reputation to live up to already," laughed Colquhoun when they were established in the smoking-room, Mr. Knyvitt being dislodged only by the plainest of hints that they wanted to talk in privacy.

"At any rate every clodhopper in the place will sneer at the bare suggestion that I may represent the C.I.D. . . . Well, now for it. Tell me, in sequence, if possible, what has been going on here."

Rather to his own surprise Colquhoun found that his story was much longer and more interesting than he imagined. He discovered, too, that the detective could be a serious and attentive listener, one who passed no comments, asked no questions, until the narrator had made an end.

Then Furneaux, in his staccato way, said a few things which changed the aspect of affairs completely.

"Pretty good shot that of yours about directional wireless," he said. "By the way, can we be sure there are no microphones fixed in this hotel?"

"I am not positively certain as to anything which may or may not happen in the neighbourhood of Greystones, but the landlord is no friend of Mr. Francis Gleave's, and he has been established in business here many years. To be candid, I may as well add that the sympathies of the village are wholly with Sir Maurice and against Francis."

"No doubt. Never under-rate the bucolic intelligence. Its roots strike deep. But let that pass for the time. Is there anyone locally we can trust?"

"I dislike giving indefinite answers, yet here again I must say that the power of Gleave's money is far-reaching. Have not I myself yielded to it? Who has such valid cause for hating the man's very name as I? Yet here I remain, living on a Gleave's bounty, and each day becoming more and more a slave to a Gleave's will."

"I'm glad you said that. You ought to know that my Department is immensely indebted to you. We appreciated the sort of ordeal you had to endure, and rather expected you would crack under the strain. That is one reason why I am here. Another is that the pot is now beginning to boil over, though we cannot even guess what sort of hell-broth is brewing. The gun you heard a few minutes since opened the battle. Unless some queer coincidence has happened—anything can happen at sea—a destroyer has just tackled Mr. Gleave's yacht. An Admiralty expert is now looking over that remarkable vessel's interior economy, and, if he is not satisfied that she is wholly free from objectionable elements, she will be towed to Harwich tonight, and thoroughly examined tomorrow. In that case her owner will not even know where she is, as she will not be allowed to use her wireless. If she is deemed without guile and released, the explanation of the search is the necessary adoption of stern measures for the prevention of certain offences against the Fisheries laws. I studied a treatise on the infernal subject in the train all the way from London. You see, I may have to talk the jargon."

"That, then, accounts for the sudden commotion in the 'wireless' room at Greystones?"

"The kind of remark I would expect from the local police inspector," snapped Furneaux. "One more banal observation of the kind and I hop off to bed. If I were not most horribly tired I'd join that stout lad on duty near the front gate, but I must be fit for a long

day tomorrow, and there's no sense in rushing an inquiry like this, which may finish up in sheer bathos or in the deep waters of international dispute. I suppose Wilkinson retired to roost an hour ago?"

"Probably. I saw no light in his cottage."

"I want to know more about Mr. Francis Gleave's remarkable tricks with cats, but that, too, must wait till the morning."

"Wilkinson has not said a word to me about cats in connection with Greystones," exclaimed Colquhoun, his face showing clearly that he thought the little detective was talking at random.

"Why should he? Wilkinson looks on the nocturnal prowlings of the domestic cat with the complete detachment of Jupiter listening to the cooing of one of Cytherea's doves. Yet how vitally important that cat episode is! One's fanciful perspective of Gleave's whole career changes the moment a cat jumps into the picture. I think far more of the cat as an illuminant than of the fine array of electric lights which, you say, adorns the exterior of Greystones. By the way, has Knyvitt gone to bed?"

"Hardly, yet."

"Let us have him in to join us in a drink."

The landlord came willingly enough. He was eager for a session with Furneaux when his cronies were not present. He hoped to hear more of the wiles employed by the Coromandel Islanders in pursuit of the elusive mackerel. But he was soon undeceived.

"I hear, Mr. Kynvitt, that you are a great authority on the cat tribe," began the detective airily.

"Me, sir!" and Knyvitt literally choked over the first mouthful of the beer he elected for instead of whiskey and soda.

"Yes. Isn't it cats? Or is it cobs?"

"Ah, now you're talkin'," admitted Knyvitt.

"Too bad!" sighed Furneaux. "I thought you

might settle a point in dispute between Captain Colquhoun and me. Perhaps, living close to nature as you do, you may know something bearing on it. Have you ever seen or heard of a tortoise-shell tom-cat?"

"To the best of my belief there ain't no sich animile, sir."

"A classic answer. But, why not?"

"To my thinkin', it has somethink to do with sex, same as the feathers of birds. There used to be a lot of tortoise-shell cats round about this village, but never a tom among 'em."

"Has the cat population decreased recently?"

"There can be no doubt about that, sir. Every old woman in the place has complained of losin' her cat at one time or another. Folk did blame the keepers on Mr. Croke's estate, where a heap of game is preserved, but they deny killin' any cat these five years or more. I don't know why, but there seems to be a lot of cat fightin' in Mr. Gleave's orchard. Wilkinson, our local policeman, was talkin' of that very thing one day larst week. He said there was such a hallabaloo at Greystones soon after twelve o'clock the night before that it fair worried him until he realised it was cats."

Furneaux slapped his knee.

"The very man for my money!" he cried elatedly. "Of course, a country cop must be acquainted with every cat and dog within miles. How clever of you to have thought of that, Mr. Knyvitt!"

The landlord tried to look astute, though not quite sure wherein his divination lay.

"Wilkinson's a decent chap, for a policeman," he admitted. "He lives just over the way. You'll be seein' him about 9.30, if you've finished breakfast by that time. He generally crosses the road to find out who's in the 'bus for the Norwich train."

Furneaux sprang up.

"Can I be called at eight?" he said. "If I don't

hurry I shan't close an eye before midnight. No cat-fights round here in the small hours, I hope?"

"Not if my two Sealyhams can help it," grinned Knyvitt.

"Good work!" muttered Colquhoun, while he and Furneaux mounted the stairs together.

"Interested now?" chirped the detective.

"Immensely—but puzzled, too."

"Of course. The subtleties of psychiatry are not to be seen with the naked eye. If it's a fine morning, you'll keep your tryst with Number Two girl, I suppose?"

"Number Two?" repeated Colquhoun blankly.

"Yes. Number One is miles away, isn't she? Or am I wrong?"

"Now that I understand what you mean, or think I do, I want to say how sorry I am this engagement was entered into before I knew you were here."

"You could not have arranged matters better. I'm going to Norwich quite early. All really reliable local records are kept there. Moreover, I shall hear the facts about that yacht. Then, I want to prowl around this neighbourhood in the afternoon. If you and I split up on the first full day we both appear in Keynham people won't suspect any collusion. We won't even meet at breakfast, eh? Well, duck any invitation to dinner. I hate eating alone."

It was difficult, however, for even a masterful little man like Furneaux to make human puppets dance to any tune of his choosing once he came within the sinister periphery of Greystones. Before he appeared next day—a few minutes after he rose, in fact—Colquhoun was tapping at his door.

"We breakfast together, after all," said the soldier when admitted. "A man from the Hall, one of the gardeners, I believe, has just brought a note from Miss Pereira. Shall I read it to you?"

"I'd sooner have the young lady's exact words than your most skilful précis," snapped Furneaux.

Though he would have denied with scorn the imputation that he was a creature of habit it was true, nevertheless, that he liked to review the previous day's work with the clear mind and restored energy due to a night's sleep. His colleagues in the "Yard," respecting his wishes, would not call him to the 'phone before 8.30 a.m. unless the exigencies of the service permitted of no delay.

"Five minutes devoted to consecutive thought before breakfast are worth more than five hours of bemused speculation after dinner," was a favourite axiom of his.

Colquhoun, of course, attributed his seeming ill-temper to a disordered liver.

"The alternative I had in mind was that you should read it yourself," he said meekly. "Anyhow, here goes——"

Dear Arthur—Uncle seems to have had a bad night. He went away in the ordinary car at 7.30 a.m., Brook driving, and left word that you and I cannot have the electric car today, as Brook is the only man here who really understands it. I'm not altogether sorry. I didn't sleep well, so now I shall curl up till luncheon-time. Will you join me then? Or do you want to go off for the day, and play golf, or something? Don't hesitate to say so if you would prefer this. After all, it is our side of the fence which has broken down this morning.

Uncle expects to be home before seven, so, if I don't see you sooner, I may be able then to send you a line about tomorrow's plans. Yours sincerely,

RITA.

"The young woman isn't exactly aching for your company," said Furneaux acidly.

"The same great thought occurred to me," smiled

Colquhoun. "I have really been wondering whether you would care to visit Greystones with me about tea-time?"

"Nothing I would like better but for half-a-dozen vital considerations. Obviously, Gleave's yacht has been pinched, and he knows it. I may have to arrest him at any moment, so I cannot take even a cup of his tea as a guest. That poor child at Greystones, who has evidently been kept awake half the night, must remain well aloof from the contaminating friendship of the 'Yard.' Even you, a hardened young reprobate, had better not be seen there with me. I suppose you want my advice? Very well—leave the next fixture to the girl. She is anxious to be alone today. Say bluntly that you think so. And, as you are a shave ahead of me in your toilette, order breakfast for the pair of us in fifteen minutes. I must have a few words with Wilkinson before leaving for Norwich."

So Colquhoun wrote that he was sure a whole day's rest was the one thing Rita needed, and he would await a message from her either that evening or the following morning.

The detective cheered up at sight and smell of some excellent fish and a super-excellent *plat* of grilled bacon and poached eggs, but not a word did he utter bearing on the object of his trip to the Norfolk coast. Colquhoun, smoking a pipe in the doorway, watched him conversing with Wilkinson, who, as Mr. Knyvitt predicted, came out of his cottage before the 'bus passed.

Waiting until the vehicle had hurried off junctionwards, Colquhoun, in his turn, tackled the policeman. He was not absolutely certain that the man was thoroughly informed as to Furneaux's identity—that is to say, he might have been given a sort of half-knowledge by the local police authorities—so a diplomatic opening was advisable.

"Was my small friend still interested in cats?" he inquired innocently.

Wilkinson seemed rather flustered. He was breathing heavily.

"Do you know who he really is?" he demanded, with a stealthy glance around lest any loiterer should be within earshot.

"Yes."

"Well, the sergeant told me he is one of the smartest men in the 'Yard,' but, to my notion, he's clean off his onion. I had all sorts of first-rate stuff for 'im—the sinkin' of Mr. Gleave's yacht last night, an' Mr. Gleave himself rushin' away by car two hours ago, but he'd hardly listen. He wanted to know if I'd ever heard of a tortoise-shell tom-cat, an' wot cats 'ad bin lost from the village, an' wot kind of noises cats made in the Greystones gardens at night. I never did——"

"The yacht sunk, you say?" broke in Colquhoun rather sharply. "Was she in collision? Were any lives lost?"

"There was a destroyer stannin' by at the time," said Wilkinson. "One of our local boats was goin' to the line ground about six miles out at the time, ten o'clock it was, or thereabouts, an' it bore up to help, but a boat's crew from the destroyer said it was all right, so our men sheered off again. Any'ow, they were sure the yacht went down, stern first. An' Mr. Furneaux could on'y talk of cats! Well, it beats me!"

The policeman, all unconsciously, had cleared the ground. Colquhoun did not profess to understand what was in the detective's mind, but he had decided long since that the little man owned an almost preternaturally acute intelligence, and, if he had taken a definite course, it would be well to support him.

"As a matter of fact, Wilkinson," he said, "this cat business is more important than it looks. Mr. Fur-

neaux extracted a good deal of information from Knyvitt on the same topic last night. You are almost bound to hear about it later. If I were you I would make no secret of Mr. Furneaux's odd notions—to Knyvitt, I mean, if he mentions the matter at all—not to any other person, of course. Just laugh the thing off. Knyvitt won't be the least little bit surprised, I assure you. It was he who told Mr. Furneaux you were an authority on cats."

"Me!"

"Don't misunderstand. He spoke of your own references to the caterwauling at night outside Greystones."

"True enough, sir. I've often seen an' heard cats fightin', but nothink to equal the murdherin' rows that went on there."

"Did you tell that to Mr. Furneaux?"

"Oh, yes. He wanted cat, so I gave him cat. Still—just imagine it! A man from the 'Yard'——"

"Now, pay heed to what I am saying," and Colquhoun's tone took on a gravity which caused the policeman to stare hard. "Mr. Furneaux knows exactly what he is about. He wastes neither time nor words. I don't think I am revealing any departmental secret when I tell you now he knew of a destroyer being on the look-out for the yacht last night. He and I and one of your own men heard the gun which halted her, and, as it turns out, led to her deliberate sinking, as that is the way I read the riddle. Just use your own quite active wits. Here is London, here are your own county authorities, keeping a very close eye, to put it mildly, on Greystones and its owner. Why? You don't know. Nor do I. But if Mr. Furneaux seeks your views on cats or field mice—even on bees and the number of old maids in Keynham—you try hard and give him the facts. I see Knyvitt peering over a

wire screen in the bar-parlour, so why shouldn't you and I laugh about my friend's peculiarities? Then we should break off our talk."

Wilkinson's forced guffaw was probably realistic enough for its purpose. Certainly his candour was quite convincing when he assured Knyvitt a few minutes later that the captin's funny little pal must have a slate or two missin'—him an' his tortoise-shell toms.

Colquhoun, turning his back deliberately on Greystones, walked through the village. He came on the parish church, one of the fourteenth-century Norman structures for which Norfolk is famous, and, finding it open, went in. It was a veritable mausoleum of the Gleave family. It held their tombs and mural tablets galore, some commemorating baronets in the direct line of succession, others recording the public services of various generals and admirals. It saddened him to think that such a notable house should have its only known living representatives in an ex-convict and a half-caste crank. The operation of the law of heredity might be clear to the strict physiologist, but it was almost beyond belief that a line of distinguished men and women—for these Gleaves had taken unto themselves wives of good birth—could suddenly develop a strain of crime and lunacy. Of course, it was going far to assume that Francis Gleave's mind was unhinged. That he was a scientist of real eminence could hardly be doubted. The only clear display of unbalanced judgment was his behaviour when he saw the cat crossing the lawn the previous afternoon. All his strange electrical devices might well be serious if somewhat intrusive tests of a new and almost perfect wireless installation, capable of receiving and transmitting both sound and power of remarkable range and intensity. If that were so, if his hatred of the feline tribe (a recognised manifestation of a peculiar character trait

found in many notable men and women) were his sole aberration, Furneaux's pouncing on that minor weakness to the exclusion of all else was, in its own way, quite as fantastic and unconvincing.

Passing through a lych-gate into the roadway again, Colquhoun sighed in sheer weariness of spirit. He wished he had never met Sir Maurice Gleave, never been advertised for. He would have been altogether happier had he left England weeks ago, and devoted his strength of mind and body to the discovery of a new career.

And then—rare sight in the England of today—a well-appointed dog-cart, with a smart Norfolk trotter between the shafts, came swiftly nearer, and the cob was almost at a standstill before Colquhoun saw that the driver, a lady, was none other than Evelyn Hilton.

"Well met!" she cried cheerfully. "I was going to call at your hotel on the off chance that you might be at home. Are you engaged? Will you come to lunch?"

"No. Yes," he said.

The young lady looked puzzled for a moment. Then she laughed.

"Very well. Jump up beside me."

By this time a groom was at the cob's head.

"Shall I hold him till you turn, miss?" he inquired. "The road is rather narrow."

"No. We'll go back by a longer route. This india-rubber gee requires more work and less grub, like the rest of us. I know you hate being driven by a woman, Captain Colquhoun, but, honestly, I think I had better keep the reins. You see, I am up to all, or nearly all, Mephisto's little tricks."

"He is well named, then?"

"Oh, he's the frozen limit. No vice—just silly pranks—like this, for instance!"

A motor-cycle dashed by, and Mephisto thought it

would be great fun to chase it. Evelyn took a turn of the reins round each wrist, and persuaded the cob to trot again after a splendid flight through the village.

"How far to Leyton—if we are going there?" asked Colquhoun.

"Twelve miles by this road—eight the way I came."

The girl's face was flushed, and her eyes sparkling. The wrist of her left glove was torn, the knuckles of both gloves split.

"Tom!" she cried over her shoulder.

"Yes, miss," said the groom.

"Tomorrow morning, at eight o'clock, have a saddle on this merry lad. I'll take him four times round the park at a fast gallop—that will be ten miles in about forty minutes. You watch him stick out all four legs when I dismount."

"How is Cæsar?" said Colquhoun.

"In the pink, but I daren't take him along the highways. He insists on lolloping in front on the off side, so my heart is in my mouth every time we meet a car. Ah! Would you?"

Mephisto tried to cut the corner as they turned into the junction road.

"I have only just finished breakfast," commented Colquhoun, "but I shall have quite an appetite for lunch."

"There will be no more trouble unless we meet a train," said the girl coolly. "How lucky you are free today! Auntie wants to have a chat with you. Your mother and she were close friends."

"I hope Lady Weybourne will have forgotten everything else save that when she sees me."

"Oh, all that nonsense was my fault. I've told her so."

It was inadvisable to say more in the presence of the groom, so they discussed the weather and the countryside until they were on top of a bridge which crossed

the railway. At that instant a light engine appeared round a bend in the line. In a few seconds it would roar beneath at express speed.

"Oh, bother!" exclaimed Miss Hilton. "Be ready to help, will you? He *might* get me forward!"

She braced herself for the rush, but Mephisto deceived her by rearing first. Then he plunged frantically. Something snapped—the shank of the bit, as it proved—and they went down the hill at a racing pace, the reins flapping uselessly on each side of the bridle.

The road was straight and clear for about three hundred yards. At that point, however, a heavy waggon, high piled and sheeted, was lumbering slowly ahead. The driver could not possibly see or hear the oncoming dog-cart, so, if anything were to be done to save life or limb, there was no time to lose.

The girl was still tugging at the reins, but Colquhoun stopped her.

"No good!" he said. "Throw your left arm around the rail, and hold tight, whatever happens!"

Then, climbing over the dashboard, with hands gripping the back-strap and feet on the shafts, he crept rapidly along the horse's back until his knees were between neck and withers. Throwing himself forward he laid his head close to the animal's right ear, and, with fingers interlaced, caught his nostrils in both hands. The combination of pressure and pull was too much for the lively Mephisto. His head bent, his neck arched; just short of the waggon he broke to a trot and a faltering walk.

The groom sprang down. Improvising a twitch out of one of the reins he soon had the runaway standing like a placid sheep.

Colquhoun climbed from his perilous perch. He looked at Evelyn. She was crying; fortunately he realised that her tears were of vexation, not of fright.

"How many miles to Leyton now?" he asked quietly.

A stormy smile shone through the mist in her eyes. It reminded him of a burst of April sunshine.

"About a thousand, I think," she murmured brokenly. "Half a minute ago we were much nearer eternity than Leyton!"

CHAPTER XIII

WHEREIN LADY WEYBOURNE IS DISTURBED

A FARMER, hoeing potatoes in a field which sloped upward from the road level, had watched the whole episode. He arrived, breathless and admiring.

"Deng me!" he gasped. "Ah've niver seen owt like that iv' all me born days. T'King should give you t'Victoria Cross, yoong man!" Then, after a glance at the broken bit. "Deng me! That contraption is neä use for a blood hoss like this 'un. . . . Why, happen ye'll be frae Leyton?"

By this time he had recognised the groom.

"Yes, Mr. Banks," said the latter. "Can you lend us another bit?"

"Ay. Ah will, an' all. It's a Pelham, a trifle rusty, p'raps, but it'll pull the jawr offen a Clydesdale."

"I would suggest an hour's steady lunging before Miss Hilton rides this brute tomorrow," muttered Colquhoun as the farmer hurried away.

"That's all right, sir," said the man confidentially.

"Stop that whispering, Tom Shaw!" came the imperious command from the high-perched driving seat. "I suppose you are telling Captain Colquhoun you had a Pelham bit on Mephisto before we started, and that I made you take it off?"

"No, indeed, miss. I wouldn't give—I wouldn't say such a thing."

"You wouldn't give me away, you mean. Well, it's true."

Evelyn alighted nimbly before Colquhoun could offer a hand. She wanted to examine the fractured shank.

"That should have held longer than the leather," she announced stubbornly.

"It was the undue leverage," said Colquhoun. "It would not have yielded but for the heavy plunge. When a horse comes down with all his weight the only practicable thing is to ease the strain until his forefeet are fairly on the ground. In the conditions, no matter what bit you were using, something had to give way."

"Even his jawr, as Mr. Banks put it."

"As it is, his mouth is cut—not badly, but enough to stop you riding him tomorrow, I hope."

She produced a dainty cambric handkerchief, and proceeded to dab Mephisto's slight wound.

"You poor darling, did you hurt yourself?" she said. "Never mind. It will be all right in a day or two. . . . Now what are you laughing at, Tom Shaw? Do you want to make me really angry?"

The unhappy groom, who had merely swallowed hard, stuttered a defence.

"Well, miss," he said, "he nearly had us all in Kingdom Come!"

"I know that quite well. I made up my mind not to scream when we hit the waggon. It's funny, but I thought of nothing else. That's an awfully clever dodge of yours, Captain Colquhoun. Are soldiers given those tips in the riding school?"

"Strong hints, we call them. But my style is not strictly professional. I ought to have placed both hands on Mephisto's haunches, turned a somersault, and landed on his neck, which surprises of itself, as the French are supposed to say."

"Oh, all right, if you must rub it in. I've apologised to Tom. Now it's your turn. You'll drive the rest of the way home."

"No," said Colquhoun, dropping his bantering tone, since Evelyn Hilton's pulse seemed to be steady as his own. "Your headstrong cob must feel your hand on

the reins when we start again. Otherwise the value of the lesson will be lost."

In the result, Mephisto passed the waggon, a traction engine and a drove of cattle without flickering an eye-lid. He brought them to Leyton within the hour.

Lady Weybourne, it seemed, was out, but would be home in time for lunch, so Evelyn was free to act as guide to one of the oldest houses and certainly one of the most beautiful estates in Norfolk. The park held veritable groves of rhododendrons twenty or more feet in height, and they were all in full bloom. It was a wholesome, English-looking place, with spacious lawns, dense coverts, delightfully arranged shrubberies, and occasional noble trees set apart so as to display their splendours without rivalry as well as provide shade for browsing cattle or herds of deer.

"I don't mind admitting now that auntie thought you wouldn't come," said Evelyn, when the two had left the house and were pacing the Italian garden on the south front. Cæsar, by the way, had greeted the visitor as an old friend, and came with them.

"You mean, of course, to put it politely, that she feared I might have a prior engagement," suggested Colquhoun. Manlike, having got a poor girl under his thumb, he was endeavouring to keep her there.

"No, I don't. She is frightfully worried about Mr. Gleave, and anxious that you should secure a lot of his money by marrying that girl—what's her name?—Marita Pereira. She found out, somehow, that you went away in a huff soon after we left yesterday. That is why I was despatched after breakfast to grab you, if possible. Now, *I'm* in the soup, because I'll have to tell her you saved my life after I had risked yours."

"Is it necessary—this telling?"

"Why not?"

"I don't know much about these matters, but I have always understood that in the best circles the worst

thing a man can do, if regarded as an eligible party for one young lady, is to rescue another from any kind of grave peril."

"Please, don't talk nonsense."

"But have you forgotten what I said yesterday?"

"No. How could I? That is——"

"Leave it at that. I shall never marry Marita, though she is a very nice girl—probably a far nicer girl than the fair unknown who may be willing to link her lot with mine when I reach the proud position of deputy assistant ranch manager somewhere in Western North America. But this talk of marriage would be amusing to a penniless soldier if the circumstances of the hour were not serious, almost dramatic. Before I meet Lady Weybourne I want you to realise just what those circumstances are."

"Why me?" protested Evelyn. Her cheeks were flooded with colour. She had not quite grasped the significance of her companion's words, but she literally dared not seek an explanation, if only because she was mightily convinced he would give one.

"I rather hoped you and I were allies," said Colquhoun.

"I'm interested in all that is going on, though I don't profess to understand much of it," she admitted.

"Well, that will serve as a definition of our alliance for the time being. We are bound to feel and think alike on most subjects, so I'll trust to luck we may be able to ratify the clauses of our yet unwritten treaty. Now, I may be running contrary to the wishes of the Criminal Investigation Department, but I am not bound by their rules, and I badly need the assistance of some more nimble brain than my own. You are my only possible confidant. If you refuse to listen my case is parlous, indeed."

"If you put it that way——"

He sought no further encouragement. He told her

everything, suppressing only the one paramount objection to Mr. Gleave's ward as a wife, namely, the mere existence of Evelyn herself. She may have realised this, for there is no measuring the subtlety of women's intuition. At any rate, she listened in silence and with growing concern, since it was a peculiar story —one founded on surmise rather than fact—with all sorts of possible explanations for even the most outrageous of guesses, and devoid of the least semblance of that which would be regarded in a court of law as evidence of criminal intent.

She was young and light-hearted, so she laughed at every reference to Furneaux, but she was shrewd, too, and, with the fearless candour of modern youth, did not shirk analysis of a puzzling situation.

"There must be some deadly serious element in Mr. Gleave's mysterious occupations," she announced, giving her mind wholly to the problem which Colquhoun's indefinite revelations had suggested rather than stated. "Naturally, I don't know much about public affairs, but father is chairman of a bench of magistrates in our county, and I hear a lot of talk on various little difficulties which occur locally. So I am quite sure that Scotland Yard and the county police would not be acting in concert unless they suspected Greystones to be the centre of a criminal organisation—perhaps a political one threatening the government if not the nation."

"May I ask one question for my own guidance?" said Colquhoun. "Have you discussed this business with Lady Weybourne?"

The girl looked troubled then. She did not answer at once.

"I am not seeking information which will be passed on to the police," he added, his tone stiffening perceptibly.

"Indeed, I had not thought of such a thing," she murmured.

"No, but we must avoid misunderstandings, at all costs, even though the effort be hurtful. But I want you to see how easily I can blunder into a false position with your aunt. She was my mother's friend; she was, and still is, friendly with Mr. Gleave. What line am I to take with her?"

Evelyn's face cleared.

"I did not tell auntie a word of what you said to me either in Hyde Park or in the garden at Greystones yesterday," she said, "always excepting the fact that we did meet in the Park and that, on being pressed by me, you revealed the name of Sir Maurice Gleave. But the sight of that man frightened her, and I think Mr. Francis has scared her since."

"By behaving so crazily about that cat?"

"Oh, that was simply silly. No. They have had two long telephonic talks, and I'm sure auntie is worried. Some people keep skeletons in their closets, don't they? Well, some dry bones have been rattling both in Greystones and Leyton since Sir Maurice was let out of prison."

Which, on the part of an inexperienced girl yet in her teens, was an extraordinarily accurate guess, as she was fated to realise before she was much older.

"I'm glad you have taken me into your confidence," said Colquhoun, stealing a look at her, or thinking he stole it. "I had better adhere strictly to the terms of the advertisement which brought me here. Obviously, I must not say a word about the police. That would not be fair to them."

"You were not afraid to trust me, then?"

"No."

"But all men pretend that no woman can keep a secret."

"I am no authority. I merely feel that for you to betray a friend would be impossible. I would as soon regard you as a potential traitor to your country."

Evelyn flushed a little at that.

"Isn't it rather dreadful even to suspect that both sorts of treachery may be bound up in this present affair?" she said, with a nervous laugh. "Really, one is afraid of one's own thoughts. . . . Ah, here comes auntie. That's her car hooting for the gate."

The Viscountess saw them and waved a white-gloved hand from the drive. They were still fifty yards or more from the house when she appeared, walking toward them. The queer notion seized Colquhoun that she did not wish to meet him in the presence of any of her servants.

"I am delighted to see you, Captain Colquhoun," she said, graciously enough, though her eyes were heavy and her mouth set tensely when in repose. "You would be surprised, I'm sure, if I hailed you as 'Arthur,' yet you heard your name often enough on my lips a good many years ago."

Then, with an almost uncanny clarity, Colquhoun remembered the pretty woman whom his mother used to meet on the sea-front at Shanklin. He was a small boy, in those days, with a boy's fine disregard of distinctions between grown-ups.

"It is I who have changed, Lady Weybourne," he said. "I recall you now so well that it seems ever so few years since we played rounders together on the sands."

She smiled at that.

"Don't let us count," she said. "It would be an appalling reckoning in the presence of a niece who was not born then."

Colquhoun's mind was still looking back through the years.

"One hates to ask such things after that rotten war," he said, "but wasn't there a youngster, Freddie, about my own age? Freddie——"

He stopped suddenly, for he had surprised the pain

in Evelyn's eyes. Moreover, once set in motion, the cogs of memory were working freely.

"Yes," said the girl. "My eldest brother. He fell on the Somme. Of course, you were in India. And which of us could follow those terrible casualty lists? I was quite a little girl, so I wasn't even allowed to read them."

Lady Weybourne had the tact of her class.

"I know you are trying to find an excuse, Arthur," she said, "but if anyone is to blame it is I. At any rate, we have discovered that we are all much better acquainted than we imagined, so now let us go in. Luncheon will be served in ten minutes, and I rushed off this morning without any breakfast other than a cup of tea."

"Have you been to Norwich, auntie?" inquired Evelyn.

"Yes. My bankers have been selling some shares, and I had to see them personally. It was quite a tiring business—something to do with a reconstruction—and they wanted to get clear, whatever that may mean. I rather fear it implies loss to some other person, as I am supposed to save a lot of money by the sale, but they assured me I was only taking proper financial precautions. I wish they wouldn't bother me at all. What is the good of having trustees if they cannot act without addling my poor wits in the effort to understand Stock Exchange transactions?"

"Have you heard of the loss of Mr. Gleave's yacht?" put in Colquhoun, preferring to break the ice then rather than at the luncheon table. But her ladyship knew more than he did as to that incident.

"Yes," she said. "A most extraordinary affair. The captain and officers are under arrest at Harwich, I'm told. I haven't dared to ring up Francis and ask for particulars. By the way, is he all right again?"

"I think so. Miss Pereira sent me a note early to-

day saying he had gone off in his car, and would be absent till a late hour."

Somehow, he thought Lady Weybourne welcomed that news. She referred to the topic again in the dining-room, where an elderly cousin, a Lord Antony Gunsbury, made a fourth at table. He was a short, rubicund person, who expressed himself with a sort of explosive humour.

"Francis may have his faults," she said, "and, whatever they are, his eccentricity exaggerates them, but I will say this for him—he fights his own battles. People in Norwich believe the yacht was sunk deliberately to avoid examination by the naval authorities. If that is so, it was done by Francis's orders, and he has gone to Harwich to face the music."

"Music you call it?" chuckled Lord Antony. "Flouting the Navy? Big drum. Biff!"

"A lawyer in the bank told me that the captain could be charged with barratry."

"Good gad! What's that?"

"Tony, don't be absurd! How should *I* know?"

"It means the wilful destruction of a ship or her cargo by her master," explained Colquhoun.

"Lots of it done. Used to make pots of money out of it myself."

"Tony!" protested Lady Weybourne.

"Fact! Ship sailed! Word went round—get on, at any price! Got on! Plonk! Ship sunk. Great place, Cardiff! Not my affair. Safer than backin' horses."

Evelyn led Lord Antony to the stables to examine the broken bit—it was quite evident that neither he nor his cousin appreciated the nature of Colquhoun's feat—so Lady Weybourne had the opportunity she sought. She dispensed with any preliminary fencing.

"Arthur," she said, "I suppose you know why Mr. Gleave sent for you?"

"Yes. Marita told me," he replied.

Her ladyship looked slightly nonplussed.

"Marita!" she almost gasped.

"Yes. I don't blame her. Do you? Her guardian had placed both of us in an impossible position, and she is not the kind of girl who would endure it a moment longer than was necessary."

"But didn't Mr. Gleave himself discuss his plans with you?"

"Not one word has he uttered thus far. He has given me to understand that a discussion is imminent, but I really believe he has convinced himself that the young lady and I will pair off on our own account. Well, we haven't, and we won't."

"And yet, why not? Such a match would conquer so many difficulties."

"I don't quite follow."

"You would both be settled in life. She is an impulsive child, and may easily marry the wrong man. Your future would be provided for. I know Francis well enough to be sure of that."

"Do you regard me as an eligible *parti*, Lady Weybourne?"

"Who could doubt it, with your upbringing, and your first-rate army record?"

Colquhoun did not ask her how she was aware of the second part of these credentials, but he was determined to break away from the concealments and subterfuges which seemed to ensnare his every step since the Gleaves had come into his life again.

"I wonder if you would take the same view if I offered myself as a suitor for your niece?" he said.

Lady Weybourne grew rather frigid. Her lips tightened, and her nostrils twitched.

"Such things are hardly a matter of comparison," she retorted.

"You only mean, I hope, that I lack the necessary financial backing?"

"Why should we go off into useless speculations?"

"That is my point. If I told you I wanted to marry Evelyn Hilton you would probably inform me that I was talking nonsense."

"I'm afraid I should have no other alternative."

"Very well. Why, then, are you so anxious to back up Francis Gleave's scheme?"

"The conditions are so different. Francis has this girl on his hands, and never was there a less suitable person for a guardianship. He feels, too, because of his brother's crime, he owes you some recompense. I am sorry if the allusion hurts. It is hardly my fault."

"No. None the less do I wonder you should be his champion. You were my mother's friend. You know that the hand which struck down my father was responsible for her death, too. What sort of opinion have you formed of me that you should imagine I would accept bounty from a Gleave and a wife chosen by a Gleave?"

Her ladyship's attitude was now quite chilling, yet, despite his lack of knowledge of the ways of women, Colquhoun believed that fear rather than anger had frozen her, and she had given him little reason to spare her.

"Why, then, are you here—in Norfolk?" she contrived to ask.

"I might answer quite truthfully that I could no more resist the influences which brought me to Greystones than a tiny scrap of steel can withstand the pull of a powerful magnet. And there was an added element of curiosity, a sense of adventure, perhaps. Moreover, I had nothing else to do, and you know who provides occupation for idle hands."

"Yet, bitter as you are against Francis Gleave, you remain? He, at least, has not injured you."

"I do not know. How can I be sure of that?"

Lady Weybourne literally blanched. A second time within a few days had Colquhoun seen this woman grow old under his eyes. She rose, but not easily. She gave him the impression that she was clinging to the carpeted floor with her feet as her hands were obviously clutching the back of a chair. But her manner did not change. She was annoyed with her guest, and did not scruple to let him know it.

"To say more would be to prolong a useless conversation," she almost snapped.

"Let us endeavour, at least, not to cover the same ground twice," persisted Colquhoun. "You invited me here at Mr. Gleave's request to try and further the matrimonial scheme, I take it?"

"As an old friend, I was naturally interested in your future."

"Now that the project has broken down, the sooner I am far away from Norfolk the better you will be pleased?"

"You must not put into my mouth words I have not uttered. But, if you demand candour you shall have it. I hope and trust you will not make matters difficult for me and impossible for my niece by—by——"

"Coming here too frequently?" he laughed. "Well, no. I can promise that. It would be playing with fire —a dangerous pastime."

Their eyes clashed. For a moment neither spoke. The woman's uncertainty had yielded to irritation. The man knew that with one brief sentence he could pierce the armour of her self-sufficiency. What if she were told the authorities were watching Francis Gleave's every move—that not only the captain of his yacht but he himself might be arrested and his house searched that very day? Colquhoun had no proof to offer for the belief, yet he was convinced that this

austere viscountess would crumple up in nervous prostration if made aware of even its plausibleness.

At the moment, however, Lady Weybourne was racking her brains for a good excuse to get rid of him without delay.

"I'm afraid Miss Hilton and Lord Antony have gone some distance," she said. "Let me order the car to take you home."

"I prefer to walk," he replied. "It is only eight miles to Keynham. I shall be at the inn by five. If you will advise me how best I can leave the park without meeting Miss Hilton and Lord Antony I shall take that way."

A footman threw open the drawing-room door.

"Mr. Francis Gleave, milady," he announced.

Whereupon Maud, Viscountess Weybourne did a foolish thing. She fainted in dead earnest.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ATTACK OPENS

Colquhoun was, of course, the first to reach her. Luckily, in falling, her head missed a marble-topped table. He carried the limp body to a couch before turning to face Gleave and the footman.

"What, then, has been happening?" said Gleave in his nonchalant way. But Colquhoun was angry. He lashed out fiercely, heedless of consequences.

"Lady Weybourne fainted the instant she heard your name," he said. "Fortunately, the footman saw her standing here."

"So did I."

"In that case, you may be able to determine why she should collapse so suddenly. . . . Meanwhile, you, my man, had better run for a maid—for someone who understands what measures to take."

The servant pressed an electric bell twice. Then he rushed out.

"This seems to have been a day of excitement for all of us," purred Gleave, still completely master of himself. "I lose my yacht. Some stupid officials imagine that I and the yacht's officers committed a crime, whereas we were only safeguarding my private property—the electrical installation on board. Having clipped their legal wings, the loss being my own, I come here to find Lady Weybourne shocked into insensibility, and you—how shall I put it?—startled out of your nice, civil-spoken ways. Strangely unallied incidents often do occur in cycles. Evidently, today is marked on the invisible calendar of life as a period of unrest."

The man's smooth, evenly balanced utterances sounded in Colquhoun's ears as the mockery of a fiend. It taxed his power of self-control to the uttermost to refrain from a retort which would change Gleave from a cynic into an active enemy. But, despite the wrath boiling up in him, he forced his tongue to ambiguity, if only that he might not do Furneaux a grave disservice.

"I cannot guess how much you know of Lady Weybourne's affairs," he said, "but she returned from Norwich in a rather distressed state, I thought. She complained at luncheon of having been worried about some financial matters—their rearrangement by trustees, I mean—not actual losses. Then, when she and I were alone, we drifted into talk of the past, which was not without its bearing on the present. She believed you were in Harwich. Your unexpected appearance——"

A lady's maid hurried in, followed by a capable-looking housekeeper. The latter, after a glance at her mistress, turned with a reassuring smile.

"If you gentlemen will go into the garden for a few minutes her ladyship will be quite well again," she said. "Poor dear! She worries about trifles, and makes up her mind not to show it. That's the cause of all the trouble. If only she'd fly into a temper, like any ordinary woman, she wouldn't have to faint."

"Sometimes," said Gleave, when the two men were out on the lawn, "persons of the lower order evolve a thesis of psychology which is phenomenally accurate. The human engine, says the housekeeper in effect, needs a safety valve which will yield to undue pressure. You saw mine in operation yesterday. *I* give way to an extraordinary hatred of cats, due, I believe, to having been attacked by a leopard when I was a small boy. What is yours?"

"At the moment it is an intense desire to cut myself adrift from the social trammels of life in England," said Colquhoun, thinking it might be safer to emulate

Gleave's mock gravity than speak with a plainness he longed to use.

"Something, then, must have upset you since this morning. Did you not hear from Rita?"

"Yes. She wrote quite a charming little note. I was killing time at Keynham when Miss Hilton turned up and brought me here."

"Miss Hilton?"

"At her aunt's initiative, of course."

"Ah! By the way, I understand you met Lady Weybourne and her niece in London?"

"That is true enough, in one sense, but all the more misleading if left unqualified. I saw them in St. James's Park, going to the Drawing-room at the Palace they spoke of yesterday. My companion at the moment was Sir Maurice Gleave."

Francis Gleave started as though he had been pierced with a long and firmly directed needle. His parchment skin yellowed, and points of fire glowed in his deep-set eyes.

"Let me explain," went on Colquhoun, satisfied at last that he had struck home. "Wholly by chance I found myself standing in the crowd by the side of an elderly man whom I did not know. We began to chat. We walked up Regent-street to a restaurant. There he was promptly arrested. A detective, wanting to know who I was that I should be in such bad company, told me his name."

Gleave was moistening his thin lips with the tip of his tongue.

"Ar-res-ted, did you say?" he muttered, while the syllabic cadence of the Indian half-caste made itself heard again in his speech.

"So the detective said. That is all. It is also the measure of my acquaintance with Lady Weybourne until she reminded me today that I knew her well when I was five or six years old."

"But this is most important, most valuable news. The police never told——"

The footman approached.

"Her ladyship has fully recovered, Mr. Gleave," he said. "She is most anxious to see you at once."

"I'll drive you to Greystones," said Gleave, over his shoulder to Colquhoun. "Wait hereabouts—five, ten minutes at the utmost."

The younger man did not reply—aloud, that is. As affecting his good repute it is as well that there should be no record of what he said under his breath. At some little distance he saw Lord Antony waddling in the direction of the west front, where the main entrance lay. He made to intercept him.

"Can you tell me," he inquired, "if there is a short cut to the main road, or must I follow the drive?"

Gunsbury pointed to a fir plantation.

"Pass that on the right," he said. "Climb a fence, left incline, climb 'nother fence, an' there you are. Bing!"

"Ting!" laughed Colquhoun, striding off.

The fat man looked after him.

"Nice young fellow," he gurgled. "Why's he hookin' it? Women are queer—damned queer!"

The nice young fellow was in such a flurry of spirit that it took his body along at a good five miles an hour. He climbed no fence, but jumped one cleanly, to be barked at and nearly grabbed by Cæsar, who disapproved of this sudden intrusion on the solitude of his mistress, Evelyn Hilton being seated just where the wood began, with her hands clasped round her knees, and her face bent in deep meditation.

She was surprised, of course, but was able to shriek a command to the dog, whose growls, however, were already dying away before Colquhoun's cheery hail.

"Well, wonders will never cease!" was the man's greeting.

"How did you know I was here?" she said.

"I didn't know. I just sprang into the Garden of Eden. Adam found Eve like that, I suppose."

"But——"

"Yes, of course. I'm fired, turned out into the cold world. Auntie got quite ratty because I wouldn't promise to marry Rita, and Mr. Francis Gleave turned up, and Lady Weybourne fainted, and Gleave——"

"Fainted!"

Evelyn was on her feet with a bound. Cæsar watched her carefully. There was something going on which he did not quite understand, but if a perfectly adjusted set of teeth were in request he could meet all demands, though, to be sure, he had never imagined that this friendly newcomer would need biting.

Meanwhile, Colquhoun explained glibly:

"Yes, but it's all right. The housekeeper says so. In fact, Lady Weybourne herself had just summoned Mr. Gleave, excluding me rather ostentatiously. So, there is no call for hurry on your part. I'm tremendously bucked at having found you, as I wanted to say 'Goodbye'—if only as a matter of form."

"But——"

"Her ladyship was polite, even in her anger. She offered a car. Now Gleave wants to drive me home, but I mean to dodge him somehow. If I have to sit by that man's side for eight miles I'll choke the life out of him before we pass the fifth mile-stone. And I think it would be a good thing for humanity if I did it, though a judge and jury would probably be both disapproving and unsympathetic."

Evelyn thought she ought to go; nevertheless she stayed. She could atone for this delay by running past the wood.

"Did auntie and you really quarrel?" she asked.

"Generally speaking, we did. I am forbidden the house, forbidden ever to see you again."

"But, why? What has happened?"

"She backed me most heartily as a husband for Rita, but, by Jove, didn't she 'bout face when I put it that I might want to marry you?"

The girl's cheeks grew scarlet.

"You never did!" she gasped, heedless of the most elementary rules of syntax.

"I would, if I had half a chance," he assured her.

"Please, be reasonable! I mean you couldn't possibly have said that."

"It sounds absurd, but the conversation turned that way, and I out with it. It was the one dominant thought in my mind."

"Well!"

She seemed to appeal silently to the heavens. Words failed—words bearing on the situation, at any rate.

"Are you going to walk?" she went on, bitterly aware of the exceeding feebleness of such a question.

"Yes. Tell me how to avoid Gleave in his car."

"The direct road leads to the right. Couldn't you hear him coming?"

"Not the safest of methods, but I'll try it."

"Well—goodbye!"

She held out her hand. He took it and held it.

"You and I may never meet again," he said. "I must break loose from these Gleaves, and hop it to the Far West."

"Write, then. Tell me how you are getting on."

"I'll do that. In the meantime, I would like to take with me a memory."

"You have that already. Rather a vivid one, I fancy. All your recent troubles began when you met me."

"I can forget them. I shall never forget you. If, as is more than likely, this is the last time on earth that my eyes shall rest on you, the dream woman of my life, won't you let me kiss you?"

She snatched her hand away.

"Captain Colquhoun!" she cried angrily, or, to be exact, with the best imitation of anger she could contrive.

"Miss Hilton!" And he stood to attention. Cæsar thrust his muzzle into his mistress's other hand, as much as to say:

"It's all right, you timid creature! I'm here!"

The snorting of a car being set in motion reached their ears.

"That's not one of ours," the girl cried. "Quick! Over the fence, and among the trees!"

Colquhoun obeyed, but she came with him—dog, too, of course. The great point was that Evelyn herself came.

From the cover of the wood they saw Gleave's car rush along the drive, and halt at the lodge, where there were obvious inquiries. After a slight stoppage the car went on. Soon its scurry was lost in the distance.

"I really *must* go now," protested Evelyn, very much alive to the fact that Colquhoun had not uttered another word, but was standing well apart from her.

"About that kiss?" he said.

"How frantically absurd!" she cried.

"It may be—to you. To me it will be a great thing in the years to come."

She rather expected that she would blush again. But she didn't. Her face grew strangely white.

"Do you really expect *me* to *kiss* you?" she murmured, and, in sober earnest, she scarce knew what she was saying. But Colquhoun understood. He took her in his arms, and their lips met. She promptly burst into tears. He kissed her again.

"Yes, it is a bit unfair," he said. "But it was worth some little distress, you darling girl!"

With that he made off across the fence and the park,

and never even looked back. When Evelyn reached the house she ran into Lord Antony Gunsbury.

"Old Gleave wanted young Colquhoun," he told her. "See him anywhere?"

"I last saw Captain Colquhoun making for the lodge," she replied.

"Gleave will soon catch him, then. Biff!"

"Where is auntie?"

"In her dressing-room. Tea an' *sal volatile*. Sniff!"

"Will you ever sit in the Upper House, Lord Antony?"

"Me? Imposs. Younger son, twice removed. We Gunsburys don't *die*."

"It's a pity—about the House of Lords, I mean. Your parliamentary speeches would become famous."

"Ha! Splendid! Bull's eye every shot, eh? Pong!"

Meanwhile, Colquhoun was striding out at a rare rate. The lodge-keeper said something as to an inquiry by Mr. Gleave, and was surprised when tipped a half-crown. The white-faced old gent in the car had merely been very angry when told that no one had left the park since he himself had entered it; nor did he pay anything for the information.

Colquhoun, of course, was not thinking of Mr. Francis Gleave at all. It was not to be expected. For him, at that moment, and during many subsequent moments, there existed but one person on earth, and her name was Evelyn Mary Hilton. But a mile at top pace induced a healthy physical reaction. His brain resumed its balance. Even a minute of calm and reasoned thought showed that he would be in urgent demand at Greystones Hall as soon as he showed up in Keynham. He meant avoiding that ordeal at any cost. A species of physical revulsion urged him to avoid Francis Gleave for the remainder of his life. He might yield to Scotland Yard's specific instructions if re-

quested to meet the man for the purpose of picking up a few additional facts. But he must have a definite mission. Visit Gleave again on a casual and friendly footing he would not do unless assured that he was serving some national purpose by sacrificing his own self-respect.

And then, of course, he recalled Rita's promise to send a note to the inn that evening. Poor girl! It was too bad that he should seem to flout her. So he evolved a simple scheme, one of those straightforward actions which is often utterly Machiavellian when opposed to the subtleties of an Eastern mind. At a village halfway between Leyton Park and Keynham he sent telegrams both to the "Fisherman's Rest" and to Rita herself saying he would not be in the village until late that night. About an hour subsequently he reached Norwich by rail, dawdled through the streets of that most interesting city, dined in a small restaurant, and caught the last train to the Junction with its corresponding 'bus to Keynham.

The inn was closed for the night, but a burst of laughter from a group of men near the door showed that its local patrons had not yet gone home. Furneaux detached himself from the group when Colquhoun alighted.

"Hello!" cried the detective, so that all might hear. "Been gallivanting in the country?"

"Something of the kind. I spent the evening in Norwich."

"Ah! Pity I didn't know. I motored from there two hours ago. You forgot, of course, that you half promised to dine with me here?"

"Was it an engagement? I'm awfully sorry. But I did telegraph to Mr. Knyvitt."

"It doesn't matter, really. Tired?"

"Not a scrap."

"Come for a stroll. The moon is rising. . . . Need you sit up, Mr. Knyvitt?"

"No, sir," said the innkeeper. "Take a key with you, and don't mind the dogs if they bark when you come in. They'll be shut off from the front hall and stairs."

The detective, who had evidently been entertaining the *habitués* of the inn after dinner, responded to a chorus of farewells. He led Colquhoun in the direction of the parish church, thus turning his back on Greystones.

"Well," he chirped, as soon as they were out of earshot of the others, "you've been having a hectic time, I'm told. Discourse!"

"It will help a little if I know just what gaps are to be filled in," said Colquhoun.

"What's this? Why this sudden display of caution? What will become of you if I, too, shut up like an oyster?"

"As I want you to be quite outspokenly candid I'll set a good example," said Colquhoun.

Forthwith, in his terse soldierly speech, he went through the day's incidents, though saying the fewest possible words as to the runaway horse and his parting interview with Evelyn Hilton. Furneaux listened without interrupting. Being a past-master in the art of goading taciturn witnesses, however, he prodded his companion into revelations.

"Mr. Francis Gleave's chauffeur, who is a decent sort of fellow, brought back from Leyton Park a far more dramatic account of the broken bit and the fiery steed," he said. "He has been here twice, and I interviewed him the second time. It is clear that Francis Gleave was disconcerted, to put it mildly, when he heard you had met his half-brother. But—what of it? I am really wondering what you and the fair Evelyn

talked about before you went into the wood and while you were in it."

"I made no secret of my intentions."

"What intentions?"

"To cut adrift from this Gleave business, and start the new life in a new world."

"Was she sympathetic?"

"Yes."

"Did she promise to wait?"

"I didn't ask her that."

"*Cré nom!* Dispensed with all preliminaries! You're a quick worker!"

Colquhoun laughed self-consciously. Their talk was taking a turn he little anticipated.

"I merely said 'Goodbye' to a girl of whom I have seen very little," he said, choosing each word with care. "She knows, of course, that the crank who lives at Greystones had decided that I was to marry Miss Pereira, and I had to make it plain that the project was foredoomed to failure."

"Miss Hilton followed your argument?"

"I think she understands."

"Oh, she would. The feminine brain grasps the essentials of that sort of problem with crystal clarity. Really, this is most interesting. Well, suppose we turn back now. I have a date with Police Constable Wilkinson at eleven o'clock. He says the cats at Greystones generally squeal about midnight."

"But, really, Mr. Furneaux, why should I be concerned in Greystones, and its cats and lunatics?"

"Heaven alone knows! But you are, so what more is there to be said?"

"Can't you be more explicit? Even Francis Gleave, with all his eccentricities, is more understandable than you. He wants to get rid of a ward, and has some fantastic notion that he can make amends to me for the death of my father by transferring the young lady to

my care. The scheme is feasible enough from some points of view. Yet how does it connect me with the serious undertakings of the Criminal Investigation Department?"

"Again I assure you I neither know nor care. Fate, or chance, or destiny—whatsoever be the occult influence which controls human affairs—decided that you should be thrust into singular prominence in a matter of national importance. It is not for me to scoff at you as wholly unworthy of such a position. I accept you, and use you; it is my firm belief you cannot wriggle out of your responsibilities any more than a plump young cockerel can escape being roasted. Pardon this simile—it is painfully exact. Your gallant Wyandotte or White Leghorn struts proudly about the poultry yard in blissful ignorance of the fact that on some dark night he will be plucked off his perch and have his neck wrung. I can only hope that your horoscope does not point that way. But, you never can tell. You certainly did not expect, a week ago, that you would be in Norfolk today, and addling your wits as to how best to avoid one girl and grab another—now, did you?"

"Put in that way, I did not," laughed Colquhoun.

"Nor did you imagine that you are now, if willing, about to enter burglariously the grounds of the Greystones estate, where you and I and a stalwart policeman will keep a close eye on Francis Gleave and his cats?"

"What's this?"

"A moment ago you accused me of indefiniteness. Surely that statement is 'explicit' enough?"

"It may not be at all convincing if we are discovered."

"Ha! You join in, then? I told you so. But we have a sort of excuse. Mr. Francis Gleave has asked specifically for police protection. Well, we are giving it. We have reason to believe that his closely-guarded mansion may be attacked by thieves any night. He has

two hundred thousand pounds' worth of radium in the place—a tempting bait for any rascal of scientific bent."

"Good Lord! Why such a quantity of radium?"

"It is not a lot, really. It would go in any one of your pockets, and you would hardly be aware of its presence. But the fact that he does own the stuff, plus the deliberate sinking of his yacht and the existence of a wireless equipment which can break through the saturation of the static—whatever that may mean—the phrase is not mine; it was sprung on me today by an Admiralty expert—leads the Government of Great Britain to take a marked interest in the affairs of Mr. Francis Gleave and make every effort to protect his life and property until he can be persuaded to tell us more about these things than we know at present. Moreover, among the men who left the sinking yacht was an Indian for whose welfare my Department shows some solicitude."

"Do you mean the Madrassi steward, Badris Das?"

"Oh, dear no! This is a bird of the same colour but of different class. He says he is a scientist, and engaged in the investigation of electrical phenomena. I should imagine he is the fellow who came to Greystones the night before last. If so, it would be rather illuminating if we could find out what he was doing and where he went during the twenty-four hours the yacht was at sea."

"Does he give no account of himself?"

"On the contrary. He is, or was, a Professor in the University College of Bombay, and a Mahratta of some importance."

"A Mahratta?" repeated Colquhoun thoughtfully.

"Yes. Does that surprise you?"

"I wonder if it can actually be possible that he is one of the two Mahrattas I saw in Hyde Park the morning I met Miss Hilton?"

"What two Mahrattas? First I've heard of them."

"To some extent it is your own fault. I was going to tell you, but you headed me off. Anyhow, this is what happened—" and Colquhoun did not hesitate to give a full, true and particular account of the strange effect exercised by a mere exchange of glances between himself and the two East Indians.

Furneaux listened like one in a trance. When he spoke it was only to give voice to a string of words which argued a close acquaintance with the French language as it may be heard but never understood by foreigners who perambulate the Boule Miche.

"Name of a good little grey man," he cried when coherent, "why did you conceal these Indians from me?"

"I never gave them another thought until you mentioned the Mahratta on the yacht a moment ago."

"And you say they took an Ealing 'bus?"

"Yes."

"Would you know either of them again?"

"I think so. I can describe them now with fair accuracy."

"Too late for anything to be done tonight," groaned Furneaux. "Tomorrow morning, provided we escape with our lives now, I'll stretch you on the rack until I have wormed out of you all the things you ought to have told me but have basely concealed. . . . Well, sufficient for the hour is the evil thereof. Here is Wilkinson. Somewhere in the darkness should be hidden at least six more stalwart bobbies. You see, if we are caught lurking in Mr. Gleave's grounds, and a row springs up, these lads will enter by the gate and come to our rescue. It's a bluff, of course, but it may work, though I shall be glad if it is not called for."

P. C. Wilkinson loomed out of the blackness of the estate wall on its western side. The risen moon, flooding the landscape with her cold, clear light, cast tenebral

shadows from trees and buildings. The policeman's bulk seemed to materialise out of nothing.

"This way, sir," he whispered hoarsely. "All is quiet up there in the house, though I'm sure there are lights in some of the darkened rooms. I've fixed a rope ladder in position. When the three of us is astride the wall we'll pull it up an' drop it inside."

"You hear?" chuckled Furneaux, clutching Colquhoun's arm. "Wilkinson counted on your coming. What chance of escape have you, you poor fish? You're in this business right up to the cleft in your chin. Wilkinson may not pay much heed to what he says, nor even know what he has said when he stops talking, but he is all there when it comes to putting you in the cart. Excuse these mixed metaphors. I'm thinking of something else all the time. Oh, what a life! Who would be a detective when he might, with luck, be a successful criminal?"

CHAPTER XV

MAN VERSUS BEAST

THE three men were standing in the deep shadow cast by the western wall. They spoke in that softest of undertones which is less audible than a sibilant whisper at any given distance. Colquhoun, who had not forgotten Gleave's indefinite yet curiously significant description of the means he had adopted to punish marauders, wondered if the others knew of the perils awaiting trespassers within that jealously guarded enclosure.

"I ought to warn you," he said, "that this place is protected by all sorts of electrical stunts. Though I have seen none in position I am probably acquainted with some of them, as the Boche was a real expert in that branch of science."

"We must take a chance," muttered Furneaux. "The hooks of the rope ladder are insulated. I have a rubber mat for use in suspected areas. We may alarm the people in the Hall, but there's a lad posted at the front gate who will hoot like an owl if he observes any stir in that direction. We may touch off a land mine, and be blown to smithereens, though I doubt it, or Gleave must have sent some of his Scotch gardeners to the land o' the leal before their due date. At any rate, we shall not be electrocuted."

"What is the exact purpose of the raid? Has it one?"

"Wilkinson here tells me that two cats have disappeared from the village since they were let out last night."

The policeman stifled a chuckle. Furneaux ignored it, or seemed to.

"I want to discover what became of those cats," he hissed. "We may learn something about them if we escape being wafted to Kingdom Come by some infernal machine. On the other hand, we may not. I'm going over. You two can follow or not—please yourselves."

Up he went, quite easily, as the rope ladder was kept from swaying by a strong staple driven into the earth. Colquhoun followed, and was bidden sit astride the wall on the rubber mat spread there. Wilkinson came next. He had his instructions. He was not to pull up the ladder and drop it on the other side until Furneaux gave the word.

The moon was now well above the eastern horizon, but a row of trees planted between the wall and the array of greenhouses which occupied the nearest section of the garden served to conceal the high-perched figures unless a sentry happened to look along the actual line of the masonry. After a pause which appeared to be interminable—though Colquhoun well remembered the long drawn-out duration of the five minutes' interval before "zero" hour—Furneaux breathed a command to Wilkinson to go ahead.

Soon they were gathered beneath the nearest tree. Furneaux affixed to the trunk a small object which shone like a glow-worm.

"The latest thing in the upper circles of burglary," he explained. "If we are surprised, and have to run for it, the last man snatches this little lamp and puts it in his pocket. Once here, we can hardly miss the ladder. Now, captain, you lead! I want to reach the shrubbery bordering the lawn in front of the house. Then we choose the best place for a wide view, and stop there. Not a word must be spoken unless I seek

your help, which is highly improbable. You two are here as witnesses, not actors. . . . Go ahead!"

Colquhoun obeyed, though he felt that he had actually gone back seven years in his life. He was not treading the devious ways of a spacious and beautiful English garden but traversing the shell-torn surface of No Man's Land, with its lurking enemies, its abounding dangers and its shreds of wire entanglement. He would not have been surprised in the least if a rocket or a Verrey light soared high above the trees, and revealed all surrounding objects in a vivid grey, from which a man's face would peer white and ghostlike. He found himself speculating as to whether his companions knew how to act in such circumstances. He nearly told them that movement was fatal until the glare died down.

The necessity, however, of choosing the right track brought him sharply to the work of the moment. Once he had hit on the pergola in which he first set eyes on Marita Pereira the task became simplicity itself. A few minutes after the three men had entered the garden they were screened by a clump of rhododendrons, than which no better protection could be devised, as the huge clusters of white, pink and magenta blossoms could hardly be differentiated from their faces, while a fine copper beech in rear prevented their silhouettes becoming visible.

And there they remained, for a full hour, gazing at the black mass of the house across the lawn, and watching perpendiculars of walls and windows becoming even more sharply etched in silver as the moon swung slowly southward.

It was a wearisome vigil. A few bats flitted and squeaked between house and trees. A pair of field mice gambolled on the grass, and one was suddenly snapped up by an owl, which swooped from the topmost branches of the very tree which hid the watchers.

The great golden eyes gleamed as the bird returned to its perch. It was hard to believe that those glowing orbs did not light up the place like a couple of small but powerful lamps.

At last the church clock chimed, and its biggest bell proclaimed midnight. P. C. Wilkinson's belt creaked. Evidently, the village constable found this silent and motionless spell of duty irksome in the last degree. He yawned, not loudly, but with sufficient languor to betray his impatience with the whole stupid proceeding.

"Lie down and sleep!" murmured Furneaux viciously. "I'll kick you hard when it's time to wake up."

The words were hardly out of the detective's mouth when a man appeared on the lawn. He was walking swiftly and stealthily, making no noise whatsoever. He came from the east wing, and was carrying a small leather bag. He appeared to be heading directly for the hiding-place chosen by the police and their civilian assistant. Two among them recognised him at once. Furneaux, who had never even seen the butler, guessed his identity forthwith.

Mr. Hick halted at the very edge of their sheltering rhododendrons. He dropped to his knees, opened the bag, and produced a struggling cat, which, however, was bound in some way which prevented its escape. At that moment an owl hooted from some point near the entrance gate, and the owl in the beech tree overhead answered lustily. Hick was startled. Indeed, there were others close at hand whose hearts raced madly for a second or two, because there is no sound which jars upon the silence of the night more unexpectedly than the whoop of the bird of ill omen.

The cat was stirred to a frenzy, but could not get away. Indeed, it seemed to be fastened to the smooth surface of the lawn in such wise that it could move its

body and limbs but make no progress. Then Mr. Hick sprang upright and raced off on thievish feet with astonishing speed.

The cat, obviously restrained, began to snarl and spit in impotent fury. It worked itself up into a frenzy, and had almost freed itself from its bonds when the front door of the house was swung open and Francis Gleave ran across the lawn. He was in evening dress save for his jacket, which was of black velvet with red collar and cuffs, the latter being hidden for the moment. His sallow face, ivory white in the moonlight, was twitching with rage. His thin lips were parted in a demoniac scowl, and his eyes literally blazed. His hands were encased in what looked like a pair of leather gauntlets. It was not until he crouched, and came on in a short, quick crawl strangely suggestive of a cat's movements while stalking its prey, that the watchers saw how the tips of the fingers and thumb of each glove were armed with steel claws.

The unfortunate cat, seeming to sense its danger, made one last frantic effort for liberty. It nearly succeeded. It was just a fraction of a second too late. Its dying screams served one good purpose, at any rate. They cloaked some gurgled protest by the horrified policeman, who was recalled to his senses only by Furneaux's admonishing nudge.

At that moment Hick came through the front door. He met his master in the centre of the lawn.

"Had a bit of luck tonight, sir, I see," he said blandly, the perfect butler in voice and demeanour. "That brute won't disturb you any more. I heard it kicking up a row, and wondered if you would get it."

"An excellent kill, Hick," replied Gleave, and nothing in this amazing episode was more bizarre than his instant reversion to a normal manner, while his utterance was soft and measured as ever. "There was only one, I think?"

"I agree with you, sir. Anyhow, if there was another, it's far enough away by this time."

"Very well. Take these," and Gleave drew off the gloves. "You know what to do with the carcass. The third tamarisk on the left of the avenue, is it not?"

"Yes, sir. I——"

"Uncle! What in the world is going on out here?"

Rita's flute-like notes were hardly recognisable. Her voice was shrill and high-pitched. She was greatly agitated, but showed no signs of feminine alarm, for she had literally run from out of the dark entrance hall, nor did she check her pace until she was standing close to Gleave. The white folds of a nightdress were visible beneath a wrap obviously snatched up in a hurry. Her bare feet were protected by bedroom slippers, and a wealth of loose hair flowed over her neck and shoulders. Again an owl hooted from the belt of trees on the lower roadway, and again the genuine owl took up the challenge from the depths of the copper beech.

Then the girl screamed quite unaffectedly.

"Oh, uncle," she wailed, "do speak! What is happening? . . . Mr. Hick, what is that you are carrying? How dare you leave before I am answered?"

The butler was so frightened by Rita's unforeseen appearance, while the loud clamour of the true owl provided no sedative for disordered nerves, that his knees shook and his teeth chattered. Still he continued to edge away. Gleave, himself at a loss for words at the outset, moved forward a pace, interposing his body as a screen between Hick and the girl.

"My dear!" he said with a mellifluous self-control which not many men could have shown in the circumstances, "you heard two wretched cats fighting. You know how I loathe the creatures. I came out to drive them away, and Mr. Hick followed. One is so badly injured that common humanity demanded its immedi-

ate destruction. That is all. Too bad you should be disturbed. Were you asleep?"

He advanced another half pace, meaning to shepherd Rita back into the house. She refused to budge an inch, however.

"I am sorry," she protested, "but the sounds I heard did not suggest a fight. And there was no other cat. I looked out. I saw a cat writhing on the lawn as though it were in pain, and then you came. I cannot tell you what I actually thought. . . . Mr. Hick, I want to see that poor thing's body. Bring it here, or——"

She made to run after the retreating butler, but Gleave was too quick for her. He caught her wrist, and literally forced her off the grass and across the gravelled drive in the direction of the door.

"You stupid child," he said, seeming to remonstrate in a friendly way, though Colquhoun well knew he was holding the girl in a grip of steel, "why should you distress yourself about such trivial things? If your rest is interfered with by these noises of the night I must provide you with a more secluded room. Squalling cats and hooting owls are not conducive to sound sleep, while they certainly are fatal to studious concentration, as I know to my cost."

Rita, rather in a passion, wrested herself free.

"Uncle," she cried, almost hysterically, "why are you behaving so strangely? I—I do not believe anything you are telling me. I *saw* what you did. It was horrible, monstrous, odious—oh, I cannot find words to describe it."

"Don't try!" and the man actually laughed. "You are overwrought. Things seen at midnight and under the moon look altogether different when reviewed in the cold light of day. At any rate, I refuse to discuss this matter further now. You and I are going in, and the house will be closed as usual. If you demand de-

tails in the morning I shall give them—but not until then. I really mean that, so do not add to the worries of an already anxious time by questioning me further now. It is—unkind."

The girl probably realised that she was serving no good purpose by further insistence. She had been made aware, too, that this ascetic dreamer was vastly her superior in mere physical strength. Her wrist still felt the impress of his fingers. Had he chosen he could have broken her arm rather than allow her to escape.

"Very well," she sobbed, for there are tears of sheer helplessness as well as of grief, "I'll keep you to your promise. There are many other things I shall ask you to deal with tomorrow."

With that she ran into the house. The listeners could hear her soft footfalls on the parquet floor of the hall and on the stairs. Gleave did not enter immediately. He looked around, intent on discovering Hick's whereabouts. But the butler had vanished. The man's chief concern just then was to prevent Rita from ascertaining what it was he carried.

Gleave, apparently satisfied that the girl had actually gone to her room, returned to the edge of the lawn and looked steadfastly at the tree which harboured that blatant owl. He was puzzled, and not without good reason, for the bird had belled twice at most inopportune moments. Even the trio crouching behind the rhododendrons felt that the scout posted opposite the main gate had proved himself not only a highly efficient watcher but a veritable enthusiast in the art of imitation. They dreaded lest Gleave's reappearance should evoke further blood-curdling sounds, but, as was ascertained later, the young constable entrusted with a responsible task had brains enough to realise that a continued display of his skill was not called for. Neither he nor any other man on duty that night could have allowed for the presence in the garden of an en-

vious rival. Oddly enough, the policeman himself had climbed a tree so that he might survey the *terrain* more clearly.

In all likelihood Gleave imagined there would be no more excitement that night. His own maniacal tension died down the moment he had torn the cat limb from limb. As he stood now in the moonlight, staring fixedly into the black and silver foreground, his features were quite benignant, his greyish white hair glistened, and the expanse of linen laid bare by a low-cut waistcoast shone like a burnished shield. It was odd that he showed no signs of that orgy of blood-lust. Yet the explanation was simple enough. He had literally held the doomed animal at arm's length, while the cuffs of both shirt and coat were protected by the long gloves. Colquhoun, of course, understood now the true significance of Gleave's cry after the luncheon party—that he was "unprepared." It was evident, too, from Rita's half-completed sentence that same evening that she suspected the butler of pandering to his master's revolting mania. By Jove!—that little detective must have read a whole volume in those few broken words! For the moment, Colquhoun almost deemed himself mentally deficient.

At last Gleave went in and closed the door, which, it will be remembered, was of steel and moved on small wheels. He shot no bolts, however. Evidently he expected Hick to come that way, too, and lock up for the night.

By this time Colquhoun, no less than Wilkinson, was so thoroughly dominated by the diminutive representative of the C.I.D.—the mannikin who had, so to speak, staged before their very eyes the amazing scene just ended—that he uttered no word until Furneaux himself chose to open his mouth. It was a tribute, a well-earned one, and its recipient appreciated it.

"Awake now, Wilkinson?" he murmured after an artistic pause.

"Yes, sir," said an humbled policeman.

"Where is this avenue, with its display of flowering shrubs?"

Colquhoun answered.

"It begins about forty yards to the right, and curves downhill to the gate," he said. "I remember the tamarisk. There are several—all fine specimens."

"And they benefit exceedingly from a dead cat interred near their roots. . . . Wilkinson, you and I must attend the funeral. We have to pounce on Hick while he is digging the grave, which, I take it, he will do now, not caring to wait until the gardeners are prowling around in the morning. You, Captain Colquhoun, do not appear in this act. Your job is to clear out by the way you came—with rubber mat, glow-worm, and rope ladder, all complete. Wilkinson and I, probably accompanied by a badly scared butler, will pass through the main gate after an unholy row. That cannot be helped, of course. Something must be done to stir this den of malefactors into real activity. The point is that you must not be seen. Make yourself scarce, please, as quickly as possible, but, for the love of Mike, don't allow Knyvitt to deny me a bed!"

The policeman merely grunted his obedience to orders. What he most wanted at that moment was to twine his fingers around Gleave's neck, or Hick's, or both necks simultaneously. He, too, had his own private reasons for self-depreciation. Many times had he heard in the vicinity of Greystones the dying screams of some hapless cat, yet never had he shown sufficient gumption to guess the actual cause of the outcry.

Colquhoun made off. He dared not hurry, because he knew now that more than one pair of eyes might be peering through the closed windows of the house. He had a good deal farther to go than the others, and,

as it happened, much less time at his disposal than either he or they counted on. The butler was in a hurry to retire for the night, and began using a spade as soon as he felt sure Marita would not put in an appearance again. Nor was his task a long one. The earth was soft in the shrubbery, and a dismembered cat packs into a small space.

The man was destined, however, to undergo a series of severe shocks within a period of time which hardly spanned five minutes, all told. The owl had shaken him badly twice. Marita's wholly unexpected interference was, from his point of view, a veritable misfortune. But these prior excitations were as nothing compared with the effect of the blinding flash of an electric torch and the sudden pinioning of both arms from behind, while a knee pressed most ungently into his spine made him double backward in agony.

"Drop that spade, Hick!" came a gruff command.

He obeyed. He could not help himself. But he shouted loudly for help, and strove fiercely to lessen the paralysing grip of an unseen assailant. Then, from the second man who held that dazzling light, came the unmistakable sound of a police whistle, and Hick understood that he was in the hands of the law, most unpleasantly so, in fact.

By twisting his neck he discovered that he was being treated thus discourteously by one whom he claimed as an acquaintance, almost a friend.

"Why, Wilkinson!" he gasped, ceasing to struggle, "you know me!"

"Ay, that I do," growled the policeman. "And I'll take d——d good care you steal no more cats on *my* beat."

The man yet invisible cackled strangely. As Furneaux put it afterwards, no mountain in labour had ever before produced so small a mouse as Wilkinson's vexed threat when he was literally opening the official

attack on an organisation which might have sapped the very foundations of the British Empire.

"But—this is an outrage," protested the butler, on being allowed to regain his breath. "I am—burying a dead cat—in our own grounds—yet you treat me—as a criminal. What's it all about?"

"You'll know soon enough, you swab," said Wilkinson. "You just keep still, or I'll——"

"That will do," broke in a voice new to Hick's ears, though he recognised in it the ring of authority. "The men at the gate are arousing the lodge-keeper. They will be here soon. Meanwhile, Hick, you had better understand that what friend Wilkinson has in mind is to hit you violently with his truncheon on the slightest provocation, which means also on the back of your head. You have annoyed him. He is a lover of cats. He would give a month's pay for a tortoise-shell Tom. You, I take it, are a collector. Have you ever seen one?"

The butler was beginning to think he was bewitched. Only a few days ago he had tipped Wilkinson five pounds for a burnt carpet worth little more than as many shillings. And now here was some small person, dimly discernible when the glare of the lamp was momentarily removed from his eyes, gibbering nonsense about tortoise-shell cats.

"All this doesn't explain—" he began.

The sentence was never completed. The entire front of Greystones Hall burst into a gorgeous illumination, the rectangle of every window, and there were forty at least, being outlined by small but powerful electric globes. The effect was rather fine, if altogether bewildering and out of place in such a remote locality. A second later many of the rooms were also flooded with light, so that the whole building shone like some noted pavilion in an international exhibition. So strong and far-reaching was this extraordinary display that

the white tails of frightened rabbits scurrying to their burrows on the opposite slope were easily discernible, while nearly every bird in the garden was not only startled into noisy flight but united, almost to the smallest tit, in attack on the owl driven from his eyrie in the copper beech. Even in distant woods the pheasants were alarmed, and the soundest sleepers in Keynham were roused by the barking dogs and the clamour of a colony of rooks perched high among the churchyard elms.

"Here come two stalwart bobbies on the run," chuckled Furneaux. *"Nom d'un pipe!* We seem to have started something. And we can see so plainly. The mangled remains of a tabby cat, apparently, and a truly remarkable pair of gloves! How interesting! But how disgusting!"

A couple of policemen raced up the drive. One of them explained rather breathlessly that they had climbed the gate. Others were persuading an unwilling lodge-keeper to unlock the side wicket.

Then Mr. Francis Gleave appeared. He carried an automatic pistol in each hand, but on seeing the police uniforms put the weapons in the pockets of his velvet smoking jacket. Behind him, never singly, hurried a surprising number of domestics. Oddly enough, Marita Pereira remained in the house.

"What is going on here?" demanded Gleave, and, no matter what the man's failings no one could deny him the possession of an unflinching nerve, for his air was that of an orthodox householder perturbed by some external racket, and his voice was completely under control.

"You tell us, Hick," said Furneaux. "Who used these nasty gloves to tear an unfortunate cat to pieces, and why are you interring the remains so secretly and at such an hour?"

The butler was silent. The question was nearly as

awkward to answer as the famous poser put by a lawyer to another who insisted that a witness should reply "Yes" or "No," without qualification. He suggested mildly that there were plenty of questions which admitted of no such simple response. When his legal opponent fell into the trap and challenged him for an example he said:

"Very well. Mind you answer 'Yes' or 'No.' Have you stopped beating your wife?"

Gleave, of course, was quicker-witted than his serving-man.

"You, whoever you are, are jumping at conclusions," he snapped sharply.

"That is not so vile a habit as jumping at cats," said Furneaux.

"Surely you are not a policeman!" jeered Gleave.

"Oh, yes, I am. I represent the Criminal Investigation Department, to which, Mr. Gleave, you appealed for protection somewhat recently. Your relative, Sir Maurice Gleave, arrived in Norwich this evening. That is one reason why I am here. You will admit, of course, that a police inquiry into a most peculiar occurrence in the immediate neighbourhood of your residence may be regarded as carrying out your specific instructions."

CHAPTER XVI

WHEREIN AN AMATEUR DETECTIVE SCORES A FAILURE

Gleave was staggered momentarily. The mere sound of his half-brother's name seemed invariably to give him a species of galvanic shock, while he evidently found it difficult off-hand to counter Furneaux's adroit thrust. But the man was undeniably clever. He shifted his ground instantly.

"That puts a different complexion on the whole affair," he said. "Naturally, I am much beholden to you, Mr.——"

"Furneaux. Detective-Inspector Furneaux, of New Scotland Yard."

"Well, Mr. Furneaux, the hour is late, and the surroundings are not conducive to a calm and judicial inquiry. I fear my electrical device must have alarmed the countryside. If you will call here in the morning my butler and I will go fully into a somewhat involved matter."

"Something of the kind must be done," agreed Furneaux suavely. "Meanwhile, before all traces of a tragedy are obliterated by a lawn-mowing gardener, I'll take advantage of your marvellous lighting arrangements to examine the place where the cat lost all of its nine lives."

"Certainly. I'll help you."

"No. I prefer to act alone. The police will see to it that every other person present remains here, in full view, till I return."

"But, Mr. Furneaux, your attitude is rather intolerable."

"Oh, no. It can be borne with ease. . . . Now, Hick, if you are not stricken dumb, tell me where you found the cat's body."

Hick, having recovered some of his wits, thought he might follow his master's lead.

"As you seem to be bringing some silly charge against me I refuse to say anything more tonight," he wheezed.

"But you have said very little as yet."

"How could I, when I was attacked and badly assaulted?"

"Well, if you won't give evidence in your own behalf it is not for me to guide you. You may be sorry in the morning, because, failing a definite statement from you tonight, I mean to lock you up."

"What for?"

"For committing, or aiding and abetting, a piece of atrocious cruelty resulting in the death of an animal. You were caught literally red-handed, as the dreadful condition of these gauntlets proves. It was deliberate too. You stole the cat in order to destroy it. In all probability you have another poor creature in reserve for a similar purpose. That, of course, will be determined when we search the premises. If I am right in this respect the case is far too serious for a petty sessional court to deal with you. You will be sent for trial at the next assizes."

Hick cleared his throat as a preliminary to speech, but his employer intervened again.

"I really think, Mr. Furneaux, you are making too much of a comparatively trivial incident," he said. "Surely your departmental chiefs will not approve of my perfectly reasonable request for police protection being used by you to gain admission to these premises in order to bring an unsubstantiated charge against the oldest and most loyal of my servants. Even if a technical offence has been committed, which I deny, as a predatory cat has no legal status, you have no right to

disturb a whole parish at this unseasonable hour, and endeavour to hold a court-martial on me and on one of my staff before the remainder of my household and half-a-dozen constables."

"You were going to say something, I imagine, Hick," persisted Furneaux, well knowing that a total disregard of Francis Gleave's polished phrases was an almost certain method of goading the man to fury.

"Speaking for myself—me personally, I mean—giving my own opinion—" began the butler.

Furneaux laughed.

"All right, Hick," he cackled. "You needn't be so d——d precise."

"Well, sir, what I have to say is this—I'm sorry if I've done anything wrong in killing a cat."

"Are you telling me you killed *this* cat?"

"In a sort of way—yes, sir."

"It may be so, but, alas, we have excellent authority for the statement that all men are liars. Now tell me where you killed her."

"On the lawn, sir."

"The lawn in front of the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"I can test the truth of that at once. . . . Must I warn you again, Mr. Gleave, that you will be compelled to stay just where you are for a few minutes? Yes, I know you have a pistol in each of those pockets. But every policeman present carries an automatic, and can use it. Once and for all, I assure you I am going through with this investigation in my own way, and you can hardly be so foolish as to try and stop me by force."

Gleave smiled scornfully.

"My good little man," he said, halting for a moment, as he was already making for the house, "do you really believe you can bluff *me?* It is for you to use force, not me. I tell you now I am going in for the night,

my intention being to extinguish the lights which are bringing people here in scores from the village and elsewhere. Hick, if he takes my advice, will follow, and do you arrest him or me if you dare."

"Hick is in custody now," retorted Furneaux. "It is hardly my duty to precipitate another tragedy—after all these years—so, if you persist in flouting my orders, I'll let you do it, for the moment."

Yet Gleave did not move. Something dagger-like and piercing in the detective's words seemed to call for explanation, though he was far too shrewd to seek it directly.

"I have not a shred of proof that you represent the Criminal Investigation Department," he said, surveying his opponent with a steady stare.

"I can produce my credentials. Here is your own letter to Scotland Yard. You recognise it, of course? With it is my warrant as a detective."

Furneaux held out both documents for inspection. The light was extraordinarily brilliant, but he advanced a few paces to render examination easier. Gleave glanced at the letter he himself had written.

"Strange!" he muttered, seeming to commune aloud. "You do not in the least resemble the ordinary policeman."

"My only valuable asset," purred Furneaux.

"But, in all seriousness, are you here as a friend or an enemy?"

"Neither. My present business in life is to see that the law is not infringed. The blindness of Justice is merely a tribute to her impartiality."

"You speak in enigmas. That letter asks for help. Do you pretend you are helping me now?"

"No. My chief official defect is a perfectly ridiculous candour, plus a perverted sense of humour. This cat-killing, atrocious though it seems, appeals to the latter quality."

"Given different conditions, I think I could come to regard you with some esteem."

"That's better. Why not, then, let me carry on in my own way?"

Gleave hesitated—and was lost.

"All right!" he said. "Stand fast, all of you!" and he indicated his retinue with a comprehensive hand-wave. "Though, by mischance, this gentleman and I appear to be at cross purposes it is not so. He has my permission to make such inquiries as he thinks fit."

Furneaux bowed. Gleave bowed. The pity was that Winter was not present. He would have appreciated the situation on its merits. Those two had suddenly become most polite. It needed a keener eye than any among the small group of domestics and policemen to detect the duellists' naked rapiers.

"In that event," said Furneaux, "I see no reason why you and I should not examine the lawn together."

Gleave did not expect that concession, but he was supremely master of himself.

"With pleasure," he assented, and the two went off. They had not far to go. The smooth expanse of grass was, of course, even better illuminated than any other part of the grounds. Certain gruesome tokens of the cat's fate were clearly in evidence, but, search as he might, and did most painstakingly, Furneaux found nothing else. He was puzzled. It needed all his skill as an actor to conceal his bewilderment from his companion. Gleave, on the other hand, was becoming more assured each moment. As he grew calmer he realised that the charge which the butler was ready to face could be whittled down considerably. Prowling cats may be shot or poisoned at will in enclosed grounds. Hick's method of destroying them was crude, but might be attributed to an excess of zeal. It would certainly be awkward if it were shown that the man

had another cat in captivity. That alternative mystified Gleave himself.

So here were two men, each of a somewhat abnormal mentality, viewing the same problem from wholly different angles, and both wondering what the solution could be.

For once in his career the detective kept his tongue still. He wanted now to examine the dead animal's carcass more carefully, as a false move would be highly inimical to the theory he had evolved. Nevertheless, if he would avoid some unsuspected pitfall, he must say something.

"Your butler confesses to a queer taste, Mr. Gleave," he said, when convinced that the surface of the lawn offered no satisfactory clue.

"It is inculcated," was the reply. "I detest the brutes. I am not singular in my hatred of the cat tribe. Many eminent men, and some women, have shared it. Poor Hick is, in some sense, carrying out my orders."

"Hardly that, if he turns cats loose merely for the unholy joy of catching them again."

"Well, no. If true, that is perplexing."

"Let us hear what he says."

Gleave knew that the detective was irritated, but he could not possibly suspect the source of the little man's annoyance. He, too, had good cause for doubt, because any man sane in many respects but a maniac in others is notoriously slow to admit that his mania is simply being pandered to by some person with an ulterior motive. As for Furneaux, the difficulty was a real one. A situation in which he held the whip hand was slipping out of his control. Between the pair of them Hick was for it, as the British Army in Flanders used to say.

But Hick, given a brief respite, had been thinking hard.

"Yes," he admitted, answering Furneaux's fierce

question without demur. "I have another cat in a basket in the power-house. I used it as a decoy. Otherwise, how could I chase and catch any cat?"

The detective glared at him vindictively. He could have demolished the man's feeble pretence with a word, but that was precisely the word he did not want to utter. If he betrayed a too intimate knowledge of all that had gone before Gleave would be warned most thoroughly, and that must be avoided at all cost for the hour.

"Very well," he said, affecting an unconcern he was far from feeling. "As you have admitted your offence you will not be arrested. You will have to appear before the local bench of magistrates on a summons, of course. Go now, and bring the second cat, together with a basket in which we can place the remains of this poor beast, and your own murderous appliances. Don't imagine because I am lenient tonight that you will escape lightly in court. You will be a lucky man if you get off with a stiff fine instead of imprisonment."

Gleave, apparently on the point of an impatient interruption, checked himself with an obvious effort. It was impossible to say whether he meant to address the butler or Furneaux, but the latter affected to understand the unspoken word.

"I think now," he said, "that your storm signal might be lowered. Otherwise we shall have difficulty in keeping people out of the grounds. Once the lights disappear the police can explain that the whole affair was due to a faulty fuse. That, I believe, covers a multitude of sins in electricity."

A curt order sent the servants back to their beds. Within a few seconds the landscape was given over to the radiance of the moon. Furneaux, walking dejectedly to the village, was joined by Colquhoun near the south-western angle of the estate wall.

"So," he snarled, "you were not long enough in the

army to learn that the first duty of a soldier is obedience."

"What have I done now?" was the surprised demand.

"I asked you to hook it, all but the rope ladder, which you were to unhook, yet I find you here."

"Dash it all, man, I was given no time! Don't you realise that if I had scaled that wall in the glare which lit up everything like the sun at noon I would have been seen from any or all of forty windows? You didn't want that blighter, Gleave, to know how you got into his place, did you? I regarded myself as a model of discretion, and do so still. Things must have gone wrong, or you would not find fault where you ought to commend."

"You're right," sighed the detective wearily. "I missed my connection somehow. But, tell me ere I die. Wasn't that infernal cat tied so that it couldn't escape?"

"Of course, it was."

"But, how? I went over the ground with a tooth comb, and failed to find the slightest trace of a piece of cord, or wire, or any substance which would account for its antics before Gleave pounced on it."

"That's too bad," laughed Colquhoun. "Naturally, you could not discover the wire. It's in my pocket."

"What?" yelled Furneaux, so loudly that some sightseers drawn from Keynham by the display at Greystones halted on the road in front to ascertain what new disturbance had broken out.

"Say that again, will you?" he almost screamed in the high falsetto to which he invariably yielded when strung to a high tension. "In your pocket? How the——"

"It's simple enough," said Colquhoun tranquilly. "I'm a bit of a scout, you know. We did, at least, learn that side of soldiering in both France and India. When I saw the absolute folly of using that ladder I

took cover again. I heard the row at the gate. Lots of people came hurrying out of the house, so I had no trouble at all in worming my way near enough to catch something of the argument between you and Gleave. I tumbled to the line he and the butler were taking—it was rather spry of Hick to shoulder the blame—so I crept back to our clump of rhodoes, and twigged the wire harness lying on the grass. It was easy to pull it in with a dead branch of one of the shrubs, and the chances were a thousand to one against anyone spotting me from a window, because all eyes were on you then as the star turn. My theory is quite consistent. A bit of stick thrust along the surface of a lawn is a very different thing from a man climbing a high wall."

"O Gord!" howled Furneaux. "And this is one of the gallant lads who won the war? What dunderheads the Germans must have been!"

Now, it has been seen that Colquhoun already credited his new friend with an almost superhuman intelligence, but it required more philosophy than he was endowed with that he should be treated thus contumaciously and not feel the lash. He thought of a dozen different things to say but luckily did not utter one of them, because the group of villagers in front had halted. Furneaux had now to pay the price of popularity in the "snug" of the inn, and at a most inopportune moment.

"That sort of flare-up will do no good to the mackerel, mister," said one of his admirers. "It'll scare every fish for miles."

"It seems to have attracted quite a lot of gudgeon," snapped the detective.

The man bore the laugh against himself quite good-humouredly.

"Ay," he said. "You're right. Happen Mr. Francis Gleave will find a shark in his net one of these days."

"But he is a most respectable and peace-loving citizen, I understand?"

"Mebbe. He has queer ways. I took a good squint at him as he drove through Keynham about three o'clock today, an' he looked as though Owd Nick was sittin' at his elbow."

"A devil-fish, in fact."

"He was fair rattled about summat. Happen he knows Sir Maurice is in Norwich. I've always reckoned that Francis would have his neck twisted when Maurice came out of quod."

"Sir Maurice in Norwich?" broke in another Keynham man. "Who tellt you that?"

"My wife. She kem home by the last train, and she passed him in the street, just outside the 'Maid's Head.' "

"How did she come to know him?"

"Didn't I marry her from the Hall? She was housemaid there for eight years afore the War."

"Ay, she was, an' all. Dash it, one forgets."

"She hasn't forgotten. To make sure she stopped and spoke, an' Sir Maurice remembered her at once. He always was a gentleman, an' hasn't lost his manners yet—prison or no prison."

Furneaux edged a little nearer to the speaker.

"Your name is Jenkins, isn't it?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, sleep soundly—all of you. I hope Mr. Gleave's fuses behave for the rest of the night. I ought to have been in bed two hours ago."

By this time Colquhoun had swallowed his wrath. He said no word till they were in the smoking-room of "The Fisherman's Rest." Mr. Knyvitt, of course, like the remainder of the inhabitants of Keynham, had been brought out by the fire-works at Greystones. Furneaux announced that he greatly needed a whiskey and soda, and Colquhoun did not disdain one. When they

were alone once more he produced some crumpled wire.

"You had better take charge of this," he said, speaking with marked restraint. "I folded it carefully, so that it will open out exactly as I found it."

Furneaux shook his head sadly.

"I wanted it to open out exactly as *I* found it," he said. "You don't realise, of course, that you have ruined one of my finest effects. You had the best of intentions, than which there can be nothing more deadly when a well-laid scheme is departed from. I'm glad we ran into those yokels. They stopped us from having a vulgar row, and Mrs. Jenkins may be a most useful person. But, for a young man who has brains, even though they be atrophied by ten years' service in the army, I wonder you didn't realise I had some good purpose in letting Francis Gleave assume I believed the butler's story. Let us review. Gleave hates cats. He revels in killing them, literally tearing them to pieces. Hick knows that, and provides the quarry. Two cats are missing from the village this morning. It is a moonlit night. Hick has a soft job, and wants to keep it, and is worried when life in the Hall threatens to relapse into orthodox channels, such as visits by a young army officer who is made much of by Gleave, and luncheon parties attended by Lady Weybourne and her niece. So, just to startle these good people, whose mere presence in an anchorite's house may portend alterations affecting Hick and all the crew of well-paid hirelings Gleave has gathered around him, a cat is staged on the lawn in broad daylight, and Gleave responds nobly. Miss Rita Pereira suspects Hick of encouraging her 'uncle' in his cheerful pastime, and actually says so. It is obvious that Hick has to arrange a genuine kill, and what night could be more suitable than this? I project myself into Hick's mind, and see how his mental processes work. I bring you and P. C.

Wilkinson in by the early door. I work up the situation with the skill of a born dramatist until I have Gleave on the verge of a furious outburst when he discovers that he is being fooled by a stolid butler. Hick then falls into my hands like a plump fowl, to be plucked alive, feather by feather, until he tells me everything he knows about Gleave, which must be a whole lot, but you step in with a display of scout craft and make off with my chief exhibit in your pocket! Of what avail is this tangle of wire now? Would Gleave accept it as evidence tomorrow morning? Would Hick admit it? Could we prove it to the satisfaction of a justice-loving and thick-headed British jury? No, sir. I am dished, undone, plunged into the hot soup up to the neck. *La banque est brulé,* as they say in the Casino at Nice. I've got to begin all over again. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

Colquhoun filled his pipe dejectedly.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I hadn't the least notion there were such complexities in the detective business. And I thought I was getting along splendidly. Let me clear out in the morning. I want to go, anyhow, and this is my opportunity."

"It can't be done," sighed Furneaux. "You've got to go through with this affair until it is settled once and for all. But, mind you behave, confound you! One more peep of Staff College initiative out of you and I banish you to the wilds of British Columbia, where girls like Evelyn Hilton do not grow on bushes and scoundrels like Francis Gleave are shot at sight."

Though abashed, Colquhoun could not help smiling.

"I have a sort of suspicion that I am really more useful than you are inclined to admit," he said. "May I put a few questions?"

"Certainly. But don't believe a word I say. When dead tired I talk at random."

"Why has Sir Maurice Gleave been brought to Norwich?"

"Because, if all else fails, we hope to stampede Francis out of the United Kingdom. The man is a menace to the State."

"But what is he doing to be regarded in that light?"

"Something he is so anxious to conceal that he thinks nothing of sinking a forty thousand pound yacht rather than let the naval authorities examine her."

"Do you think that the Indian found on board was the fellow who arrived last night?"

"It is highly probable."

"Queer how he harped on the intellectuality of Indians in his only long talk with me. You remember the two Mahrattas I met in Hyde Park. Is the fellow one of them?"

"Possibly. Gleave has some strange associates."

"Those men linger in my memory because I owe to them my first real meeting with Miss Hilton."

"The darling! Your voice quavers when you even mention her name. Well—your Hyde Park Mahrattas seem to have vanished into thin air, unless, that is, one is now in Harwich. Can you describe them in greater detail?"

Colquhoun did his best and Furneaux grew more and more interested. He even elicited by a sort of auto-suggestion a point which Colquhoun had forgotten but now remembered—that they wore small, plain, triangular gold pins in their neckties.

"Is Gardhwar Singh a Mahratta name?" he said when the other had no more to add.

"It sounds like one. I am not sufficiently well acquainted with the different races in the Bombay Presidency to be certain."

"You're sure they waited for an Ealing 'bus?"

"A West Ealing 'bus."

"Glory be! All this good time wasted. You said

'Ealing.' Don't you know enough about London to realise the vital distinction between Ealing and West Ealing?"

"No. I'm awfully sorry for the slip. But there's no mistake now. They allowed several other 'buses to pass which would have taken them to the Bayswater Road or Holland Park."

Furneaux rose.

"There may be nothing in it, but we'll have to go over the ground again," he muttered wearily. "You certainly are the limit, yet, somehow, I can't resist having confidence in you. You've heard of those unpleasant beings who carry disease though themselves remaining immune. You're something of the sort in diffusing information in this Gleave mystery. Mind you, as this latest instance shows, it betokens no rare intelligence on your part, so don't develop swollen head. You simply cannot help it, any more than a dog can avoid having fleas."

CHAPTER XVII

OVERCOMING THE STATIC

COLQUHOUN slept long beyond his customary seven hours. He was tired, mentally and physically, so he awoke with a vivid impression of the guns still booming during the Third Battle of Ypres; Furneaux was hammering on his door.

"Get up, you lazy hound!" the detective was shouting. "Here are eggs and bacon sizzling and you in bed! I have secured Mrs. Knyvitt's special permission that you may descend in your pyjamas and dressing gown. Breakfast will be on the table in five minutes."

Colquhoun glanced at his watch. The time was 9.30 a.m.

"I was hard at it for nearly eighteen hours yesterday," he said by way of apology when he joined Furneaux in the dining-room. Then he took thought, and added:

"In some respects the most wonderful day in my life."

"I hope the lady was duly grateful for your level-headed bravery in stopping that runaway," smirked the other. The younger man blushed.

"I don't remember making much of a song about that incident," he said.

"As a matter of fact you neither said nor sang anything of the least practical value to me. If I had to depend on you for information I might as well shut up shop and play marbles. But, let that pass. You should, however, absorb one quite useful fact concerning life in a country district. No man can perform

feats of cool gallantry in broad daylight here, and hope to remain unseen. If you want to get away with the unknown hero stuff you must try the Thames Embankment or Piccadilly Circus. What I really want to know is what actually happened in the wood as between you and Miss Evelyn Mary Hilton. And—pardon me—you are about to sprinkle castor sugar over your eggs."

"Confound you! Let me eat my breakfast in peace!"

" 'Nuff said. She was angelic. I am not sating idle curiosity. If there is not the slightest prospect of your rescuing Mariana from the Moated Grange, or Marita from Greystones Hall, I must devise other means of assisting that quite attractive young woman, whom I have seen only by moonlight. I am firmly of the opinion that she ought not to dwell under the same roof with Francis Gleave one moment longer than is necessary."

Colquhoun grew sharply interested.

"You don't imagine she is in any personal danger?" he demanded.

"No. I am sure of it."

"But—good Heavens!—something must be done!"

"Isn't that what I have just said? When you are dressed I want you to go to Greystones and spy out the lie of the land. You are the only one who can possibly succeed. By this time my name is mud with Gleave. That man has brains. He has done some thinking since we parted soon after midnight. And I doubt very much if Hick can maintain the poor defence he offered last night. At any rate, the feline population of Keynham should be safer now than it has been for years."

"Do you know, Mr. Furneaux," put in Colquhoun seriously, "I have been wondering what exactly is at the back of your head in following up this cat business. Does it lead anywhere? Gleave's craze is a nasty, morbid sort of thing, of course, but I really can-

not see why it should interest the Criminal Investigation Department."

"Quite so. At first sight it might be equally difficult to detect the connection between canaries and poison gas."

"The canaries are highly susceptible to the gas. When they stiffen it is a warning to us poor sojers to put masks on. Of what earthly consequence is it to the welfare of the British Empire if Gleave kills a few cats?"

"You assume, then, that the revelation of Gleave as a lunatic, who arms for his pet obsession by pulling on leather gloves tipped with half-inch steel claws, is a matter of no importance?"

"It is, if you want to shove him into an asylum. I can't grasp its bearing on such high affairs as seem to be involved in the sinking of the yacht, for instance."

"I myself do not grasp it. I sense it. As you have deliberately ducked a perfectly fair analogy drawn from your own murderous profession, let me suggest others. The choicest flowers and fruits can be, and frequently are, grown from a dunghill. The most spiritual and artistically satisfying of Greek legends are derived from sources of unspeakable foulness. If Gleave turns out to be a homicidal maniac on the grand scale why should he not foster his scientific bent in that direction by indulging in less sensational orgies? Now, although you fell flat last night I am still inclined to trust your discretion. Perhaps you may understand if I repeat more fully what I told you yesterday. If so, kindly explain, because I confess that the theory leaves me cold. One of our greatest living experts in wireless assures my department that world-wide experimenters are trying to devise an equipment which will break through the saturation of the static. When that is accomplished all sorts of marvellous things will become practical realities. This expert's conviction is

that someone has succeeded already, but is keeping his discovery to himself. It is, it seems, a peculiarly dangerous power for any man or set of men to possess secretly. If you were not so ready to scoff I might add a foolish thought of my own on the subject of cats——"

"I'm awfully sorry," broke in Colquhoun. "Now it is up to me to be candid. I was only trying to head you off another topic altogether."

"Exactly—name of Evelyn, I believe? *Ca va!* I forgive you, and carry on. Wireless is far more efficient by night than by day. So is a cat. A cat can see by night. A cat exudes electricity. A cat is completely devoid of such qualities as remorse or pity. A cat is self-contained, secretive, suspicious of all the world. Any fool of a dog will rush open-mouthed into any room or out of any doorway. Did you ever see a cat do that? Now, just supposing Francis Gleave has all the attributes of a cat in a superlative degree, is it not conceivable that he may actively resent what he regards as a feeble imitation in an inferior animal?"

Colquhoun laughed, though anxiety blended with his amusement.

"I can't argue with you," he conceded. "You are what the Americans call a spell-binder. My difficulty is that you have been so extraordinarily right in some things that I dare not question your accuracy in others. But, reverting to static, you have raised one of the most abstruse points in the transmission of electrical force, whether by cable or by wireless. Two closely allied phenomena, known as resonance and surging, cause static under such conditions, say, as a short circuit. These disturbances are not often serious, but the results can be terrific when there is a violent rise in the voltage. You get it quite obviously when lightning strikes a telegraph wire. It is equally powerful though not so definite when it interferes with wireless.

That is what I may term a general statement. If anybody can negative or subdue the effects of static he has done something big."

" 'Subdue,' " muttered Furneaux. "I like that word. It may mean a great deal."

"By Jove!" cried Colquhoun excitedly, "a fellow in the 'Rag' was saying the other day that wireless installations all over the country were complaining of brief periodic interference of the kind. He called it 'paralysis'. Now, I wonder——"

"Suppose some such singularly effective force came into operation, and could be directed, what might be the effect?"

"Every electrical appliance within its area would be put out of action. Trains would stop, signals cease to act, power fail, lights go out. It would play old Harry with all types of warships and motor-cars. Even the motors would be minus their spark plugs. I ought to have said that magnetic and electrical energies are so closely allied that what applies to the one is generally true of the other. There are important deviations, of course, but the differences are highly technical."

"You know something about these matters?"

"Very little. But you cannot run a field telegraph and portable wireless for months on end in a wild country where you have to make your own repairs without picking up a few facts and sustaining a few shocks. The shocks invariably come first, by the way."

"Here is one coming now. I see Wilkinson crossing the road. He is bursting with news."

And, indeed, the local representative of the law had something of importance to tell them. He entered the room, glanced around, closed the door, and said in a hoarse whisper:

"Hick has gone!"

"What? Not dead?" cried Furneaux.

"No, sir. He's alive enough. But he has just left

Greystones with his luggage. He may be catching the ten o'clock at the Junction, or he may have gone on to Norwich—it is the same road. I had no right to stop him, had I?"

"Not the shadow of a right. But you're a sharp fellow, Wilkinson. You've done more than merely hurry in here, I'm sure."

"He won't get away from Norfolk so easily as all that, sir. One of our men is after the car on a bicycle and will soon know if he takes the train, and where he booked for. Then Norwich will be told by 'phone. Hick will be picked up all right."

"Have you any idea how long he has been in Mr. Gleave's service?"

"Yes, sir. If he's to be believed he was valet to Mr. Gleave in London, afore the family came back to Greystones."

"Since before the War, in fact?"

"All that—mebbe longer."

"Is he married?"

"I've never heard of no Mrs. Hick, sir."

"Is there a housekeeper in the Hall?"

"There's been no talk of one. I think there is on'y about four maids in the house. Women don't like the place. They get skeered."

"I have no doubt. Do you know a Mrs. Jenkins, wife of a man who comes in here most evenings? She used to be a housemaid at Greystones."

"She's a great friend of my wife's."

"Ask her to oblige me by coming along within the next ten minutes, if possible. I'm just going to 'phone Norwich, but will be back at once."

Wilkinson looked doubtful.

"The telephone girl at the post-office is hand in glove with the people at the Hall, sir," he said.

"I'm glad of that. I hope she will remember every word I utter. . . . As for you, Colquhoun, I want you

to visit Mr. Gleave and his ward without delay. If you are received you must use your own wits and make the best of the opportunity. Will you do this?"

"Yes," said Colquhoun, though not with enthusiasm. "I don't like the job, but I must go through with it now, I suppose."

"Be good, and I may find you an errand to Leyton later in the day, unless I visit Lady Weybourne myself."

He raced out before Colquhoun could seek an explanation of this cryptic remark. When the younger man was ready for the road he was informed that Mr. Furneaux had gone with Mrs. Jenkins to find the lady's husband, whose land lay at some distance from their house in the village.

In effect, the detective covered a good deal of ground while Colquhoun was dressing. He held a brief conversation with Winter, of which the first part, in English, dealt with the excellent prospects before mackerel fishers, and the second, in French, provided for the waylaying of Hick, ostensibly by the Norfolk County Police but really by Winter himself. Then he, Furneaux, had persuaded Mrs. Jenkins to apply for the temporary position of housekeeper at Greystones, which she was quite willing to do, subject to her husband's approval. In the result, she was installed in the place that afternoon. A plucky woman, she was distinctly proud of the fact that she had become a trusted emissary of Scotland Yard.

Rain had fallen during the night, but the sun was shining gloriously as Colquhoun walked the few hundred yards to the Hall. Humidity and warmth combined had encouraged the trees and hedges to reveal their summer greenery. It was as though the whole landscape had been tinted by a magician. Even the crops showed progress. Patches of land bare to brownness yesterday were clothed in the lightest of emerald

robes today. The somewhat gaunt stone house itself seemed to have receded a little into a more compact frame of trees and flowering shrubs. It was one of those fine English mornings when the heart almost insensibly accepts the truth of Browning's fine thought that God is in Heaven and all is right with the world.

A touring car was standing on the road outside the lodge, and, when Colquhoun arrived, he found a superintendent of police trying to persuade the gate-keeper to admit him, together with a sergeant and two constables. He stood aside, but gathered that the superintendent wished to place a police patrol at Mr. Gleave's disposal during the next few days, whereas the guardian of the iron gates had received strict orders to admit no one nor transmit any messages to the house until Mr. Gleave awoke. His master had passed a disturbed night, and was not to be called until one o'clock, he urged, whereas the local police officer was anxious to make the necessary arrangements for protecting the place and get back to his own centre.

The lodge-keeper remained adamant. He suggested that the superintendent's only alternative was to telephone from Keynham post-office. When he caught sight of Colquhoun, however, which he failed to do at first as he was speaking from behind the locked gates, he seemed relieved.

"Here's a gentleman who may be able to settle things a bit," he said. "Miss Pereira expects him, so I can let him in. He can tell her about you, and she'll probably know what is best to be done."

The superintendent eyed Colquhoun doubtfully, but the sergeant whispered something, and his senior's manner changed at once.

"It will be most helpful if you arrange this matter for us," he said genially. "I have reason to believe that Mr. Gleave himself will welcome our assistance. Will you kindly let me hear his decision as quickly as pos-

sible? As a way out of the difficulty, Sergeant Sheldon and the two men might be admitted to the grounds until Mr. Gleave is up and about. Then, if he prefers to dispense with them, they will leave."

Sergeant Sheldon! Colquhoun looked at the sergeant and saw the ghost of a smile flicker across the man's face. At close quarters it was quite noticeable that the pupil of Sheldon's right eye was considerably larger than that of the left. So the net was tightening. No more subtle disguise for a Scotland Yard detective could be devised than that he should masquerade as a sergeant of the local constabulary.

So the visitor was admitted, and walked up the drive. He was passing the pergola where he had first seen Marita Pereira when the girl herself appeared. She looked rather white and tired, and she did not speak but beckoned, indicating that he was to follow her. She led him at once to the depths of a small grove of firs.

"I think we are safe from being overheard here," she said in an undertone, and without any word of formal greeting. "I imagined, or hoped, that you might come early, so left an order at the gate and watched the road. Mr. Gleave, of course, would not approve of this—not that I care greatly—but you are the only person I have any confidence in, and I must tell you what has happened. You know, I suppose, what took place last night?"

"Yes," he said, taking refuge in a monosyllable.

"Everything?"

"I think so. There was a rather lamentable scene. It is reported in the village, by the way, that your butler left about an hour ago, having probably been dismissed."

"Yes. That was my doing. He did not kill that poor cat. It was Mr. Gleave himself. But Hick is a vile person, too. I watched the whole dreadful affair.

While Mr. Gleave and Hick were arguing with a funny little man and a number of policemen on the drive I saw another man reach out from beneath the rhododendrons and secure the wire with which Hick had fastened the cat so that it could not escape. . . . No, please don't interrupt. I have so little time, and there is so much to say. For some reason Mr. Gleave is bitter against you. His attitude has changed entirely. He says you flouted him yesterday, and that you went to Leyton in order to quarrel with Lady Weybourne."

"Lady Weybourne sent her niece to bring me there to lunch," he broke in then, but Marita seemed to disregard his explanation.

"It is matterless," she went on, speaking with a directness and concentration of thought he hardly deemed her capable of. "Matters have reached such a stage here that I must break loose or I shall soon be as mad as Mr. Gleave himself. When he and the butler came in after the disturbance in the garden they extinguished the outer lights and began talking in the hall. Mr. Gleave seemed to be praising Hick for some cleverness he had shown in taking the blame for the cat's death on his own shoulders. I could not stand that, so ran downstairs, and told Hick to his face what a miserable liar he was. They were both badly frightened when they heard of someone having found and taken away the wire. Mr. Gleave was the first to recover. He realised that not only had the butler been humbugging him but also that the police must know the truth. I was terrified, because I thought Mr. Gleave would shoot Hick dead on the spot. However, he controlled himself, telling Hick to await him in the library, and leading me to my room. He thanked me for what I had done, but ordered me never to see or speak to you again. He was in such an excited state that I retired without another word, though I listened for a long time behind my locked door for any sounds which might

indicate a struggle between the two men. At last Hick went to his room, and my maid tells me he was up half the night packing his trunks for departure this morning. That is all I have to say really—just to warn you to avoid Mr. Gleave. You should not come here even if he sends for you. As for me, I shall not pass another night in Greystones unless I am kept in by force. Please go now."

"But I must ask what your own plans are. Have you relatives in England? Have you any money?"

"I can maintain myself for a time in London. I can sing. Surely I can find work?"

It was pitiful to hear this woe-begone girl talking so bravely of the quest in which he himself had been engaged for many weeks and with such ill-success. Yet, if he would help, he must decide quickly on the right course, as Rita was manifestly disquieted, and wanted to end the interview with the least delay.

"Will Mr. Gleave allow you to leave Greystones in this manner?" he asked.

"I don't know. I can only try. Why should he want to detain me? I am a sort of menace to him now, I imagine."

"I wonder if I can persuade you not to take any precipitate action. That little man you saw in the grounds last night is Mr. Furneaux, a Scotland Yard detective. He is a phenomenally clever chap—quite a genius, I think. Won't you let me consult him first? Even if I am forbidden the gate he will certainly find some way of communicating with you."

"Mr. Gleave told the servants he would not leave his room until lunch time. But that means nothing. He may be listening to us now. Oh, I am afraid! I shall not draw an easy breath again while in this house."

He caught her hand impulsively. Was she not a waif like himself, and, despite her musical talent, or, perhaps, because of it, in far more desperate straits?

"Do stand fast till you hear from Furneaux," he pleaded. "I don't know what to advise for the best, but I have the greatest faith in his judgment, provided always he does not ask you to remain here indefinitely, which he is quite capable of doing if it suited the purposes of the police. Promise, now. Or, if you do actually leave Greystones today, be sure and call at 'The Fisherman's Rest'. Inquire for me or Furneaux. In the very unlikely event of both of us being out, have a note written, saying where you are bound for, and by what train. The Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department is at Norwich. His name is Winter. He may wish to see you. And, by Jove, I was nearly forgetting. A local superintendent wants to station a sergeant and two constables in the grounds—at any rate until Mr. Gleave wakes up and decides whether he will retain them. The lodge-keeper will admit them if you give the word. The sergeant, by the way, is a thoroughly dependable fellow. You can rely on him for help in any real emergency. Now, won't you be brave and take heart? You are not wholly bereft of friends, you see."

Rita's lips trembled, but she smiled wanly.

"If you only knew the relief it has been to meet you this morning!" she murmured. "Yes, I'll risk letting the police in. They must not enter the house, of course. I dare not strain my poor authority that far. And I'll try and do the other things you asked. You go first to the gate. It might upset everything if I were seen walking through the grounds with you."

He gave her hand a reassuring grip.

"All being well, I'll see you again before the day is out," he said.

He had a word with Sheldon in the roadway, and the detective promised to have a talk with Miss Pereira, if possible. In any event, she could hardly come to any harm. What the police really expected, and did not

want to happen, was that Gleave himself might elect to depart for London or elsewhere at short notice.

Rita did not appear again, but the policemen passed through the wicket, and the superintendent drove off. He offered Colquhoun a lift, which was declined.

"I'm mixed up in this business, whatever it is, more than is good for my health already," came the smiling excuse. "If I accompanied you to the village the fat would indeed be in the fire."

Luckily Furneaux was at the inn, and listened carefully to his delegate's account of affairs at the Hall.

"That settles it," he announced without hesitation when the story was ended. "Knyvitt tells me there is a car for hire somewhere around. You're ready to start, aren't you?"

"Ready enough. But where am I to go?"

"To Leyton. Didn't I half promise it?"

"But, dash it all, man. I was forbidden the place yesterday!"

"Never mind that. Greater people than Lady Weybourne have changed their minds in far less time. You go and tell her it is her bounden duty to come straight to Greystones and carry off that girl on a long visit. Don't be afraid to bounce her. Hint at terrible things. She'll give in all right."

"What terrible 'things' am I to 'hint' at? Is Gleave's mania for cat-killing one of them?"

"It will serve, perhaps. If not, say outright that the authorities are after Gleave, and will get him this time. Scare her, any old way. Don't quit till she promises to act. Best of all, come with her in her own car."

"Of course, I cannot refuse, but do you really believe I shall be successful?"

"If Lady Weybourne were Lord Weybourne I should be sure of it. With a woman you never can tell. She may fly into hysterics. In that case, appeal to Miss Hilton. Something must be done, so you get busy and

do it! This is only another form of static. There may be some resonance and surging, but you must tackle the job as though it were one of your field batteries, and your own life, as well as the lives of other people, depended on its due performance. *Cré nom,* the simile may not be so far-fetched. Off with you!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE UNHALLOWED DEPTHS

THUS it befell that the man who, some twenty hours earlier, had been driven forth from Leyton with contumely, returned thither as a sort of emissary of the police, though there was indeed a rather definite probability that his errand might render him even more unpopular with the mansion's aristocratic owner than he was already.

He passed the lodge unchallenged, a relief in itself. It would have been almost farcical were he compelled to explain his errand to a heavy-jowled and doubting Cerberus, and perhaps be requested to wait outside the gate until "her ladyship" authorised his presence at the front door!

Be sure he kept a sharp eye at park and gardens for a glimpse of Evelyn, or, failing her, of Lord Antony Gunsbury. But the grounds were empty, save for gardeners and the like. He was to be given no helpful respite from an ordeal which he shirked. Of course, during the run from Keynham, he had tried to rehearse the probable scene with Lady Weybourne. But he abandoned the effort without worrying too much about it. Everything depended on the sort of reception he was given. The Viscountess might decline to see him at all. In that event, however, his second message would startle the servant who conveyed it, if not his mistress. Of course, if "auntie" were literally not at home he would ask for the "niece." Indeed, he was persuaded that Evelyn Hilton could be counted on for more prompt and courageous action than a woman al-

ready candidly afraid of Francis Gleave, one who had announced her intention of never visiting Greystones again. But Colquhoun was a soldier. Furneaux had given fairly specific instructions, and they must be followed to the letter. The wretched cat's wire entanglement was still a rankling memory.

He was received by the very man who had ushered in Francis Gleave the previous day, so, being recognised, the first part of a difficult way was smoothed somewhat.

"Her ladyship has a visitor already, sir," said the footman, "and I think she may be engaged for some time, but I'll take in your name. Will you be seated in the reception room?"

On the spur of the moment Colquhoun changed his opening move.

"Perhaps, as I am not expected, I had better write a brief explanatory note," he said.

"Very well, sir. This way, if you please."

So the unbidden guest wrote:

Dear Lady Weybourne—I may seem to be disregarding your request that I should not seek your further acquaintance. It is not so. I am here on most urgent business connected with Greystones. Please allow me to explain.

Yours sincerely,

ARTHUR COLQUHOUN.

The footman was gone longer than the mere distance of the one room from another on the same floor appeared to warrant. When he returned, he looked puzzled, but, with the complete impersonal detachment of the well-trained English servant, said merely:

"Her ladyship will see you in the drawing-room, sir."

Naturally, Colquhoun's first glance was at Lady Weybourne. She was seated near a window at the far side of the room. She did not rise, but lifted a languid hand.

"Come in, Captain Colquhoun," she said. Waiting until the door was closed, she indicated her earlier visitor, a tall, elderly man who stood up when Colquhoun entered, but whose face was in shadow.

"You had better know at once that Sir Maurice Gleave is here," she went on, in a voice that was icily distinct. "You may have recognised him already. Yet it is best to avoid any possible misunderstanding at the outset."

Colquhoun was in the centre of the room by this time. He had, of course, identified the elder Gleave at once, though, for a heart-searching second, he hoped his eyes were deceiving him. He remained stock still, and looked steadily from the woman to the man.

"Yes," he said, not without surprise at his own self-possession. "I have met Sir Maurice Gleave. It had been better for me and mine if he had never existed. But, on this occasion, I must disregard him. What I have to say, Lady Weybourne, is for your own ears alone."

But her ladyship only sighed wearily.

"I don't think so," she said. "If you have come in reference to anything Francis has done Maurice should know all about it. Please don't let us have any heroics, Captain Colquhoun. I actually screamed just now when the footman brought your note. It is Fate, I suppose, which brings you here. Very well. I am resigned to it, but I cannot endure these continuous shocks. Sir Maurice will not interfere. He may even assist, so do try and forget the terrible thing that happened many years ago. You two need not pretend to be friends, and that sort of nonsense, but you can certainly spare me any recriminations."

"In a word, Arthur, as I certainly did not kill your father, you can at least sit down and ignore me," put in Gleave, and his tone was that of the bored indifference to any other person's opinions of him which had

marked his meeting with Colquhoun in St. James's Park.

It was a situation demanding far more experience of life's vicissitudes than Colquhoun could boast. But he had learnt in a hard school that the first principle of successful warfare is the attack, so, acknowledging Sir Maurice Gleave's comment by the merest nod, he approached Lady Weybourne, and drew up a chair, placing himself purposely in such a position that he faced her alone.

"It will simplify matters if I ask first if you have heard anything of recent developments at Greystones," he said.

"It will be vastly more simple if you tell me why you are here," countered the woman.

Gleave, evidently a somewhat irrepressible person, broke in without scruple.

"Maud," he said, "you are making our young friend's task rather difficult. Why do that? He only wants to know whether you have heard of the sinking of the yacht, and of last night's extraordinary scene, the main outcome of which seems to have been the killing of a cat by Francis and the arrest at Norwich of Francis's butler, a man named Hick, only an hour or so ago. . . . Yes, Arthur. Lady Weybourne is only too well posted as to those events. She knows Francis is mad. She fears he is a criminal. Have you come to tell her her fears are justified?"

It was altogether monstrous and incredible that Colquhoun should actually feel grateful to Maurice Gleave, yet some sentiment of the sort peeped up in his inner consciousness, and would not be denied expression. He turned partly, and looked at the man.

"Your summary of recent local history clears the air, at any rate," he admitted. Then he went on, addressing the Viscountess again.

"It is not for me to say that Mr. Francis Gleave has

broken any law. I am sure he is not in his right mind, but it might be difficult to get him certified as a lunatic. There can be no doubt, however, that his actions are viewed with grave suspicion by the Criminal Investigation Department. Some of the leading men at Scotland Yard are now watching him closely, and one of them, in intimate touch with all that is going on, has deputed me to request you to get Miss Marita Pereira, Mr. Gleave's ward, away from that mysterious house today, this afternoon. If you do this thing, it will be a kindly and womanly act. I have seen her this morning. She tells me she is resolved to leave the place at once. She refuses to remain there another night unless detained by force. That alternative is not to be thought of. The police, I take it, have their own reasons for not adopting strenuous measures against Francis Gleave at the moment. I am not in their secrets. I do not know what really grave charge they can bring against him. But I am quite sure Marita is in a position of genuine distress, and you are the one person in the world who can assist her without raising all sorts of trouble and scandal."

Lady Weybourne, who, despite her protest, was cold and unmoved as a statue, strove valiantly to meet Colquhoun's steadfast gaze during that straight-forward speech. But she failed. Her lack-lustre eyes had to drop, nor did she lift them or try to reply when his voice ceased.

"Pereira?" inquired Sir Maurice. "Was her father a Portuguese planter in Bihar?"

"So Mr. Francis Gleave informed me. Her mother was English, and, for some cause not stated, Marita became Mr. Gleave's ward."

"Odd!" mused the other man aloud. "I knew Pereira—a decent chap, member of a well-known Portuguese family. Last fellow in the world to be a pal of Francis's, who would prefer the company of

some Brahmin fanatic or Buddhist humbug any day. . . . Well, Maud, what about it? This young lady has to be rescued, the police say. If you don't go, I must."

"Impossible!" snapped the woman, though her hearers knew she was endeavouring to convince herself rather than announcing a firm resolve.

"What is 'impossible'—not the effort, surely? One of us must make it at any rate. You may succeed. Unless I have forgotten the ways of my esteemed relative he will be only too glad to get the girl off his hands. Of course, if you refuse your assistance, I'll take on the job, and you know what that may mean—a most frightful row, with all sorts of unpleasant developments."

It was, indeed, highly perplexing for Colquhoun that Sir Maurice should be advocating his cause, and bringing arguments to bear which, while meaningless to anybody else, seemed to have a most potent effect on Lady Weybourne. She moved uneasily—if she were not a lady of some importance it might almost be said she fidgeted. Colquhoun felt that the less he interfered the better. He had put his case clearly enough. If the Viscountess raised definite objections he might be able to answer them. So he waited.

And he was right. Lady Weybourne's first words showed that she was yielding.

"You said that this girl, of whom I know so little, has determined to leave Greystones on her own account," she cried. "She must have some plan in mind. She has somewhere to go. Why should this disagreeable mission be thrust on me?"

Colquhoun was prepared for that.

"Some days ago," he said, "before this latest crisis in her life, Marita told me she had a musical bent. As a matter of fact I have heard her sing and play, and, without any pretence at real knowledge on my part, I should credit her with marked talent in that direction.

Her vague purpose now is to reach London and seek employment. I have bitter and recent experience of that sort of effort, and can imagine nothing more calamitous for a young and pretty woman, without friends and with little means, than a frenzied rush to a city she is wholly unacquainted with. It would be a miracle if she fell into good hands—an even greater miracle if she found the right road to a professional career."

Lady Weybourne shot an almost baleful glance at him.

"What a pity your interest is so impersonal!" she murmured.

Colquhoun, of course, knew what she meant, but the implied taunt left him cold. He believed that this woman of the world who, no matter how distraught she might be still kept her wits about her, was eager to provoke him into an angry retort. So he merely leaned forward in his chair, with his hands clasped, and wrists resting on his knees, in the attitude of one who had said all he wanted to say, and was not to be drawn into an argument on outside issues.

Sir Maurice Gleave chuckled.

"Your point is not taken, Maud," he said. "Now, in the bad old days before I was sent to penal servitude you used to be adroit and level-headed. For instance, you would not dream of scowling at an unpleasant task which was unavoidable. This one isn't, of course. You have only to put your foot down and say 'No,' in which case I deputise. But you must make up your mind. Miss Pereira's advocate has described his business as urgent. It is. Francis and the girl may quarrel badly over the luncheon table. If you order your car now you will be just in time to still the rising storm. This is all of a piece with what I was telling you when Colquhoun arrived. Take my advice, and go."

Lady Weybourne rose.

"Very well," she said. "It can do no harm to bring the girl here for a few days. You have a car, I suppose, Captain Colquhoun? If you will not think me too discourteous I would prefer to travel alone."

She had yielded rather suddenly, Colquhoun thought. Still, there were more serious problems at issue than the temporary disposal of Marita in a house where she was not wanted, while Evelyn Hilton might be depended on to soften some of her aunt's asperities.

"I believe you are acting rightly, Lady Weybourne," he said, sincerely enough. "Of course I shall return to Keynham without trespassing further. I hired a small car in the village. You will pass me on the road, I expect."

"No," exclaimed Sir Maurice decisively. "Now that you are here, young man, you and I must have a talk."

"That is no part of my undertaking," said Colquhoun.

"Obviously, since you could not possibly be aware of my presence. Are you so thin-skinned, then, that you flinch from any conversation with an ex-convict?"

"Hardly a worthy retort, Sir Maurice. Isn't it even more obvious that any sort of discussion between you and me must be painful, and, what is worse, useless?"

"You are not in a position to judge. I am. When a broken man of my age asks for a hearing, Arthur Colquhoun, you should not be so ready to refuse."

Lady Weybourne, already on her way to the door—in the circumstances, Colquhoun was at a loss to know whether he should open it for her: it seemed that he himself should be the first to go—paused, and looked at Gleave.

"Maurice," she said, "is this necessary?"

"Why, of course, it is," he answered, with the impatience of a philosopher vexed by the absurdities of lesser mortals. "You and I can no more avoid the dis-

closures of the next few days than we can resist the law of gravity. That is why you must go now to Greystones and I must tell this aloof young gentleman certain facts he is ignorant of. Luckily, up to the present we have the authorities with us. Would you have us fight on Francis's side? It wouldn't matter so much to me, because I'm ruined socially already. But why should you want to crash, too? Come, come! Let us have this affair settled one way or the other. We are losing time. Don't you see you are immensely indebted to Colquhoun for coming here at all?"

"I—suppose so," she faltered. She looked at the younger man in a way he failed utterly to interpret. But her few hesitating words were clear enough.

"You must—try and forget—what I said yesterday," she almost whispered. "And—Sir Maurice—may be right. You must listen—perhaps believe!"

Then she went out, in a panic-stricken way, as if she had said too much and feared the consequences.

"What a difference a coronet makes!" growled her somewhat cynical adviser. "Maud as a viscountess is not a bit like Maud as a woman."

He threw open a French window.

"Let us get into the open air," he said. "That other girl may sail in at any moment. As for Gunsbury, if I heard his pizzicato chatter at this moment I'd be most rude."

Colquhoun could not help reflecting on the queer coincidence which led him through that self-same window on two consecutive days and each time in the wake of a Gleave. On the first occasion he had accompanied a man who was treating him with kindness and was apparently trying to benefit him. Now he was following an admitted felon, against whom he had every reason to feel embittered if not vengeful. Yet he knew that he could believe no word Francis Gleave said, while

there was that about Maurice Gleave which compelled acceptance, even trust.

But he was completely master of himself. At least he had served Marita's interests; his own were by no means so engrossing. It did not occur to him that he could have adopted no safer attitude. He was calm, unemotional, detached. He was not concerned in the imminent disclosure of the Gleave family's secrets. He would vastly have preferred a speedy departure for Keynham, and, if his wishes were consulted, an equally prompt disappearance from a locality where he had found nothing but disquiet.

In the distance, fully half a mile away, he saw Evelyn and Lord Antony, with Cæsar on a leash because of the deer. They were heading for the house, and could hardly distinguish Sir Maurice and himself, screened as they were by shrubberies and ornamental trees.

Gleave saw them, too.

"I thought so," he exlaimed. "We're just in time. There's a summer-house to the left, beyond the lily-pond."

He strode off, little thinking that he was snatching from Colquhoun that which promised to be a last opportunity of hearing again a voice which would haunt his dreams for many a year, of seeing once more a face which could never grow dim in his mind's eye.

It was better so, he thought. With a sort of Spartan endurance of self-inflicted pain he suggested that the waiting car should be sent out of sight.

"Oh, what matter?" said the other. "Why not stay for lunch? They're sure to invite you, and me, too, though Tony Gunsbury will be absolutely incoherent at the notion of sitting at table with me. It wouldn't be a bad plan to await Lady Weybourne's return."

"No," said Colquhoun. "That will not suit my arrangements at all."

Gleave shot a surprised look at him.

"You have a bad habit of deciding things before you know what is going to happen," he said. "I had that failing when I was your age. It led me into trouble, so take warning by my horrible example, and stop it now. But this verbal skirmishing is hardly fair. You don't understand what I'm driving at. How could you? All I ask, by the way, is a patient hearing. Be as non-committal as you like, but do try to be unprejudiced."

Colquhoun did not answer. In silence they skirted a small lake, bordered by an Alpine rockery. Beneath a group of cedars was a graceful pavilion, evidently a place used for tea, because there were little tables about, and a number of wicker chairs. Its sides were of latticed pine logs, so it was open to light and air from every quarter.

"Will you smoke?" inquired Sir Maurice. "I'm sorry, but I carry neither cigars nor cigarettes. I lost the habit while in prison, and don't intend taking it up again."

Gleave's impersonal way of alluding to his misfortunes during the past decade was rather distressing. Colquhoun realised, with a new and saddening force, that this well-born and distinguished-looking man was sent to penal servitude just before the War broke out, and, in consequence, had been as thoroughly cut off from all the epochal events of the past ten years as though he were already in his grave.

"Sure it won't distress you if I light my pipe?" he said.

"Not an atom. Like that queer little chap, Furneaux, I like the scent of tobacco, though he rages against the use of it. He reminds me of Voltaire. He is as caustic a cynic, and just as self-contradictory."

"Oh, you know Furneaux, then?"

"I met him twice in London and yesterday at Norwich. I have the utmost faith in him. If ever my good name is to be rehabilitated in the eyes of the world he

is the man who will accomplish it. And that leads me at a bound, so to speak, to the reason why I have brought you here. I have said already, and repeat it now, that I did not kill your father. Don't imagine I'm going to re-open every page of that closed chapter in my life. That would be impracticable, and, what is worse, useless. But I must make a few definite statements which I cannot prove—yet. I may never be able to prove them. That depends largely on Furneaux. You have been told, I suppose, that I and Francis were trustees for one of the last of the small private banks—the institution of which your father was manager?"

"Yes. I ought to say I have never read the account of the—the trial. My mother could not bear the thought of it."

"Ah, poor lady! She was the real sufferer, because she lived. Well, now for what I must describe as the unproved facts—a contradiction in terms which is lucid enough, anyhow. I, egged on by Francis, did things which, if not actually illegal, were not countenanced by sound banking practice. They were possible only because of the predominant position my family held in the control of the bank's funds. We backed certain shipping companies which were in low water in 1913. We believed that the swing of the pendulum would restore paying freights and high dividends. Plenty of men, either millionaires of the hour or the past founders of great fortunes, have done the same thing, and pulled it off. We went a trifle too far. It was not until I was in the dock, charged with manslaughter, forgery and embezzlement, that I realised how skilfully Francis had escaped all personal responsibility. I didn't blame him for that. I knew enough about Eastern mentality to see why it was Maurice and not Francis who signed all documents and acted as figurehead. Francis had, and still has, a remarkably clear

brain. He foresaw the impending war. He prophesied the still greater slump in shipping which would follow the outbreak of hostilities and the rebound which must come when ships were sunk while the need of immense cargoes became even more accentuated. He obsessed me with his theories, which, by the way, went dead against the opinions of economists and statesmen. But, between us, we frightened your father. When it came to plunging with the last resources of the bank there was a quarrel, and you know the sequel. I believe now that Francis's veiled project was to force both bank and shipping concerns into bankruptcy, and buy the assets. That is what he did do ultimately, and it must have been his plan all along. Although my share in the bank was two-thirds and his one-third—while we provided our proportion of your father's eighth interest—he always had control of far more liquid cash than I, because the bank business, obviously, was not yielding any real profits, while its money was locked up unwisely, as everybody thought. Well, the day came when two hot-headed men wrangled fiercely and came to blows, or rather, drifted into a stupid scuffle. Francis was present. He not only failed to help me in argument but affected to be overwhelmed by the consciousness that your father, whose commercial probity could never have been assailed, was in danger of being regarded as equally culpable with the trustees. I want to be brief in this phase of a wretched affair. I believe Colquhoun struck me, but cannot be certain. I unquestionably pushed him aside, and his heel caught on some matting. He fell, striking a chair, but not violently. He might have been momentarily stunned—indeed, he must have been, because Francis went to his assistance. And then, seizing the opportunity with the skill and cunning of a fiend, Francis murdered him!"

The two men, one young, one middle-aged, yet curiously alike in temperament, gazed fixedly into each

other's eyes across the small table at which they were seated. Gleave had not spoken dramatically. He seemed to be so profoundly impressed with the truth of what he was saying that his words needed neither gesture nor emphasis. But Colquhoun, after a few seconds of shocked silence, saw, or thought he saw, the damning answer to the older man's statement. It was a plea, a self-deluding explanation of the crime for which he had been punished by the law. How could a son accept such a poor excuse for a father's death? How was it possible even to pretend some sort of astounded credence? Yet the dominant feeling in Colquhoun's heart was pity.

"Oh, I'm not blind to the defects in my story," went on Gleave, and there was no trace of bitterness or resentment in his voice. "It is told rather late in the day, too—nearly eleven years after the event, when the judge who tried me, and the counsel who defended me, and the London specialist who made the *post-mortem* examination of my victim's body, are dead. But I believe in my soul that my version is the right one, and, in God's good mercy, something in the shape of definite evidence of Francis's guilt may yet be forthcoming. That little detective thinks I am innocent. Ah, if only he can prove it! Don't you see what it means, no matter how few my remaining years? I shall be in peace. Nothing can undo the past. Nothing can still the pain of that ghastly existence in convict settlements. Think of it—a man of my age and record as an Indian Civilian, herding with gaol-birds while I might have been serving my country. I besought the authorities to let me out under an alias. I would have gone back when the War ended, if I lived. It was not permissible, of course. But it will mean a great deal now if I can assure my own weary heart that I did not kill my friend or his dear wife, or cause any of the anguish and suffering and temporary loss which followed so quickly on the

heels of that unhappy dispute. Surely that is worth while. I should like to lay my bones with those of my ancestors in Keynham Church and feel that the last of a not obscure family had not disgraced his line. I have no heir. By some contriving of Providence Francis, too, has never married. It would be an awful thing if my house descended through him. The whole world would rue it. There was a time when I was a materialist, but that has gone, with other evil influences. I know now that when Christ cast out devils in Judæa He was doing that which poor mankind greatly needed. There are men still on earth who are possessed of a fiend, and Francis Gleave is one, else I am mad and he sane, I the dupe of demoniac influence and he an inspired prophet. You have seen him, Arthur Colquhoun, when the spirit in him was naked and unashamed. *You* say, then, which of us two is man and which devil!"

CHAPTER XIX

A DAY OF SURPRISES

THE strain was becoming intolerable for Colquhoun. All around were the gracious sights and sounds of an English park. A pleasant breeze rustled the fronds of the cedars. The noonday sun glorified tree and flower and herb with that luminosity of colour to which neither painter nor poet can ever give vicarious life. The day, the environment, called into being that fleeting vision which mankind likes to regard as a heaven on earth. But, even with Paradise was devised the snake. Here, in this scented garden, was one talking openly of demonology as an accepted fact, a theorist in full accord with the belief of some learned divine who told of the power of cosmic evil to afflict a heedless world.

Gleave, however, was not appealing for judgment. The younger man had forced a vague utterance of his inability to answer that dramatic question when the other continued as though he had not spoken—held up a hand, indeed, to stay the broken words.

"I well know the weakness of my case," he said, speaking with the judicial calm of one who discusses a point of law rather than a tremendous problem affecting his own life. "For some years I held myself responsible for your father's death, and that mortal detriment dwarfed all else to insignificance. I see now that I could have fought the other counts of the indictment, used the law's proverbial delay, caused inquiries and adjournments spreading over years, and, after the whole tangled skein of financial dodges and subterfuges was unravelled, quite possibly escaped. But my

counsel, like myself, was hypnotised by that charge of murder, mitigated, not without effort, to one of manslaughter. He thought I had got off rather lightly. I regarded my punishment as fully merited. It was not until I met some unscrupulous company promoter in Parkhurst Prison that I began to suspect Francis. This man assured me I had been 'done,' as he put it. 'I know the ropes,' he said. 'When the chestnuts are taken from the fire you should always keep your eye open to see who is the monkey and who the cat. Your brother Francis is a millionaire and you're in quod. D'ye get me?' He certainly made me think hard. For the first time I suspected that I had accepted my guilt too readily."

Colquhoun, in spite of himself, was deeply interested.

"You must allow me to break in here," he said. "The other evening in Keynham a rather knowledgeable chap who knew your family, and was well posted as to the trial and what followed, expressed exactly the same view."

"One juryman convinced already," was Gleave's grim comment. "Well, somewhat later, in Portland, I became assistant librarian, the most agreeable job for a convict of any education. I came across essays on the finances of the War, and read how the shipping shares I had bolstered up with the bank's money had risen from shillings to pounds. Brankshome's name was mentioned, and Francis's. They had worked together, it seemed. One day Brankshome was made a peer, which benumbed him, and he died. I was permitted to communicate with my lawyers, and they reported that Francis had saved £50,000 out of the wreck for me. Then I knew where I stood. Francis's solicitors, Messrs. Smith, Son and Smith, tried to get me to sign a receipt in full discharge of all claims and liabilities. I refused. The authorities were rather

decent, and allowed me to attend to correspondence without delay. In the upshot, Smith, Son & Smith paid over the fifty thousand as representing, in their opinion, the sum to which I was entitled. My champions accepted it, 'without prejudice'. I was allowed to write to Scotland Yard, and, although the reply was studiously official and cautious, I knew they wanted more. So I drew up a sort of *dossier*, setting forth fairly both facts and guesses. They acknowledged that, and, to my surprise, my sentence was shortened suddenly by six months. I ran into you soon after my arrival in London. Twice since have I had the narrowest escape from sudden and violent death. I need not trouble you with the details. But Superintendent Winter agrees with that little fellow, Furneaux, that I was about to be 'removed' as being a menace to someone. Now, Francis is the only person on earth who has reason to fear me. Having an Eastern mentality he went to work in the Eastern way. Rather adroitly, he made known his terror to the authorities, and did not budge out of Greystones once in six weeks until the sinking of the yacht brought him to Harwich yesterday. Yet it is I, not he, who is now really guarded by the police. The driver of the car which brought me here today is a constable in plain clothes, and a police cyclist is in waiting to escort me back to Norwich. In a word, Francis is scared. His castle is crumbling. As soon as the detectives secure evidence enough to apply for a search-warrant and are free to enter Greystones Francis must either leave the country or stand his trial for conspiring against the safety of the realm. My chance may come then. I don't know. I can only hope. 'Murder will out' says the old saw. If it does, the logical inference is that your father did not die as the result of a stupid brawl for which I was responsible, but was foully murdered by Francis Gleave!"

For a little while there was silence. Sir Maurice

seemed to have completed his brief analysis of an extraordinary story, one of those weird romances of real life in which truth is stranger than fiction.

Then a frolicsome Borzoi came bounding over the rockery, but stopped short when he saw Gleave. So Evelyn Hilton could not be far away.

"Hello, Cæsar!" cried Colquhoun, extending a friendly hand.

The dog came nearer. The older man smiled with the ready camaraderie of the lover of animals.

"Cæsar!" he said. "A fine name for a noble hound. Do you belong to the house?"

"He is Miss Hilton's," explained Colquhoun. "Will you tell me, before the others arrive, why you are here today?"

"Mr. Winter thought I might clear up some doubtful points in the financial operations of the two years after my trial if Lady Weybourne chose to assist. She is willing, I think. Maud has brains. She must have suspected that things were not as represented. My notion is that she should be left alone, granted she sides loyally with me as against Francis."

"What has she decided?"

"Nothing—yet. She hadn't a chance. You turned up, and she nearly faded away. But she has gone to Greystones, and will either come back with that girl or precipitate the fight to a finish which cannot now be delayed much longer. You understand, of course, that Francis had to square you, too—either that or blow you off the map. That is why he wanted you to marry Miss Pereira. You are not willing to compound on those terms, I hear. Is there another girl?"

"Yes."

Evelyn Hilton and Lord Antony appeared, Cæsar having galloped back to guide them. The girl waved a hand. The two in the summer-house stood up.

"One of the footmen told me you were here—at Ley-

ton, I mean—" she cried, "and he saw you sauntering off in this direction. Was it you who sent auntie——?"

Then she gave Colquhoun's companion a second and more searching glance. Gunsbury had halted suddenly. His wonted air of vacuous good-humour had yielded to a frozen stare.

"Yes, Tony," said Gleave, smiling in his sardonic way. "You are not mistaken. It is really I. Last time we met was at dinner in the Ritz. I haven't been there recently. Is the grub as good as ever?"

"Ha!" gurgled Lord Antony.

"And 'Ha' to you. As I cannot ask Captain Colquhoun to introduce me, Miss Hilton, allow me to explain that I am Sir Maurice Gleave, a once wicked baronet, but now quite a reformed character. Have you come to tell us lunch is ready?"

Evelyn was mystified, but her reply was tactful enough in the unusual circumstances, since a returned convict as a guest at Leyton was distinctly out of the general run of things.

"If Lady Weybourne has invited you to lunch, Sir Maurice, it can be served almost directly," she said.

"Play fair, Morrie—" broke in Gunsbury. "You used to—once—what?"

"I believe, on my honour, that the niece will be deputising quite properly for the aunt," said Gleave. "But, what is one meal the less? Sorry I cannot remove myself. I must wait here till I see Lady Weybourne again."

Some irresistible urge welled up in Colquhoun's heart. It might have been the sight of Evelyn once more when he had left her, as he thought, for ever. And, again, the sheer instinct which draws some men together and drives others apart compelled the knowledge that Sir Maurice Gleave had been more sinned against than sinning.

"It is not for me to interfere in Lady Weybourne's

house," he said, meeting Evelyn's wondering and candid gaze with grave recognition of her dilemma, "but I must say, in common honesty, that I believe her ladyship would not refuse Sir Maurice her hospitality. They were together when I came here half an hour ago. I know she expects to find him here when she returns."

"From Greystones?" put in the girl.

"Yes. She has gone to—to invite Marita Pereira to come back with her."

"Tell you what, Morrie," murmured Gunsbury. "You lunch with me."

"Well played, Tony!" said Gleave.

"We'll all lunch together," announced Evelyn decisively.

Colquhoun shook his head.

"I literally must rush off to Keynham," he said. "I'm not my own master. Lady Weybourne may not think of calling at the inn and telling Mr. Furneaux whether she is successful in rescuing Marita. He will certainly know all about it, yet I cannot assume that."

"Rescuing Marita from what—from whom?"

"I leave Sir Maurice to explain. This is vastly more his affair than mine."

Gleave nodded.

"That's true, too," he said. "Although the very existence of the girl was unknown to me before I reached Norwich yesterday her fortunes are bound up with mine. Queer, isn't it? There can be no doubt, however, that Captain Colquhoun should make for Keynham. That is the nerve centre of present operations. He seems to be a somewhat lucky young man, so he will survive the attack."

"What attack? You two speak in riddles."

"Quite the right word. Here is a riddle to which none of us knows the answer. Such conundrums are

dangerous, but, if anyone suffers, it should be a Gleave. . . . . Well, Tony, aren't you glad to see me?"

"Yes, I am. Can't talk, though. Feel as if I'd go off—pop!"

And, indeed, Lord Antony's eyes had not yet receded into their sockets, while his face was alarmingly red. The two men drew together, each surveying the other curiously. They were of the same age and period, and had been cronies in the old days.

"Find a job during the War?" inquired Gleave, taking the lead as easily as when they were boys together on the Hill.

"Remounts. Mustangs, plugs, Percherons—rough stuff, but hard as nails. Doormats stuffed with steel springs. On—off—Bing!"

They made for the house. For a little while, at any rate, eleven long years were forgotten.

"What is this all about?" demanded Evelyn, half consciously asserting her feminine right to share any secret with the male who had told her he loved her at first sight. Today his attitude was by no means lover-like. He was a man burthened with weighty affairs. Nor did he endeavour to mislead her in that respect.

"You remember the detectives I met in London?—I told you of them that morning in the Park," he said.

"Yes, of course."

"They are here, all three. Something tremendously big is at stake. The Chief is at Norwich, their temporary headquarters. Furneaux is staying with me in 'The Fisherman's Rest.' Sheldon—and this is unknown to anyone outside police circles—is actually doing duty as a uniformed sergeant within the grounds of Greystones itself. We had a rather exciting time there soon after midnight last night——"

"You mean the lighting-up of the outside of the Hall. Our servants heard of it early this morning."

"Well, don't ask me to describe what happened. A

cat was killed this time. Rita saw it, and quarrelled with her guardian. She talks of running away, so Furneaux sent me post-haste to seek your aunt's aid. Lady Weybourne was quite decent about it. She lost no time in making for Greystones, and will, I hope, bring the girl here."

"Just because a cat was killed!"

"It sounds rather mad. I said so myself a few hours ago, but I've changed my mind. After all, small causes produce great effects. If the cackling of geese saved Rome it is possible that the death of a cat may help in preserving the British Empire. Because that is the great underlying fact. The Criminal Investigation Department suspects Francis Gleave of some treacherous or subversive scheme affecting the whole nation. I don't know what it is. Last week I would have laughed at the absurdity of it all. To-day I'm puzzled—ready to believe anything. Common sense tells one that the full strength of the Home Office would not be exerted without good reason, and there cannot be the slightest doubt that the thousand eyes of the law are scrutinizing Greystones and its occupants."

"But what has auntie to do with all this?"

Colquhoun had foreseen that question.

"Nothing personally, of course," he said, without a moment's hesitation. "She is an old friend of both Gleaves, which is lucky for Marita——"

"Never mind Marita. What power have these men over Lady Weybourne that she cringes before them? She does, you know. When Sir Maurice arrived he sent in a note——"

"So did I," smiled Colquhoun, hoping to chase from that pretty face the frown of thought and alarm.

"Don't be stupid! You gave your name. He did not. Auntie was dreadfully upset, but pulled herself together, and shooed Tony and me out of the house.

Now he, Sir Maurice, is so certain of his ground that he stays for lunch. He's welcome, of course. But does one act that way after being in prison?"

By this time they were crossing the open lawn in front of the house. Gleave and Gunsbury were awaiting them near Colquhoun's car, a disreputable little roadster, all tires and mud.

"I want you to accept what I say as being my honest belief," said Colquhoun hurriedly. "Lady Weybourne need never figure publicly in this affair if she simply sits still. That is what the authorities want, I am sure——"

"Haven't they just packed her off to Greystones?"

"That is an errand of mercy. Marita herself will, I hope, explain its real urgency. As to your aunt, she will not be compromised in any way. Get Sir Maurice to talk. And, if it is not asking too much, send me a line to the inn saying when and where you and I may meet again. I thought I was going away at once, but I cannot. It would be like deserting when the regiment had deployed for attack. Goodbye—but write."

"Will you be in any danger?"

"Hardly. The police will not allow that. Shall I hear from you?"

"Yes—soon. Tomorrow, perhaps. Anyhow, can't you telephone me?"

"Why, of course. Splendid! . . . Cheeri-o!" This to the men, and he was gone.

Nearing Keynham he saw Lady Weybourne's car approaching rapidly. His own driver, acting on instructions, slowed up. There were two ladies in the limousine, and one waved to him. He recognised Marita. The Viscountess seemed to bend forward, but the car did not stop.

"That's that," he said to the driver. "Wait till I fill my pipe, and then trundle the old 'bus to Knyvitt's

pub. I rushed my breakfast, and this keen Norfolk air gives one an appetite."

"Sir Maurice Gleave looked well, sir; he did, an' all," said the man unexpectedly.

"Ah. You remembered him, then?"

"Why, yes, sir. Barrin' three years in France I've lived in the village all my life."

"Well, you see, Miss Pereira being the daughter of an old friend of his, Lady Weybourne kindly decided to bring her to lunch."

"Happen she'll keep her there, too. Yon's no place for a nice young lady, or for any Christian, man or woman, if it comes to that."

Colquhoun laughed, and lighted his pipe. Keynham was wide awake. Any attempt to throw dust in its eyes was distinctly an application of matter in the wrong place.

In so far as his special purpose in life was concerned that afternoon, however, he might as well have remained at Leyton. He ate alone, mooned about the village, never so remote from the inn that he could not watch its comings and goings, and entered into desultory conversation with some of the inhabitants. But he had neither sight nor sound of Furneaux, nor Wilkinson, nor of any variety of man or woman on constabulary duty. When the fourth or fifth inquisitive villager had hailed him with thinly veiled curiosity, plying him with bucolic gambits of talk meant to encourage gossip about Greystones and the Gleaves, he retreated to his own room, to smoke and read and survey the village street from a curtain-screened angle. A stroll in the direction of the Hall was tempting, but he resisted the impulse, knowing full well he would be seen.

At last, about four o'clock, there was a slight incident. The girl in charge of the post-office telephone sped swiftly up the road and made for the inn. She

went round to a side door which opened into the kitchen. Knowing she was under suspicion as being friendly with the fugitive butler, Colquhoun thought he would try to find out her errand, so he walked quietly to the head of a service stair-case, and was rewarded by hearing the visitor ask a housemaid if "Captain Colquhoun" was still in Keynham.

"Yes," was the answer. "I saw him about the place not long since. P'raps he's in his room. Shall I call him?"

"No," said the other. "He may be wanted on the 'phone, and I was only wondering if I should hold the line. It would save time, you know, if I could say for certain he had left, and he told some people yesterday or the day before he was going."

The only persons in Keynham to whom Colquhoun had made any such statement were the lodge-keeper and Knyvitt. If the landlord had not spoken of the matter in his own household it was highly improbable he would mention it outside. So, here was some slight evidence of a link between Gleave's private information bureau and the local post-office. The connection was so tenuous, however, that he would have given no further thought to it had not chauffeur Brook brought a note within the next half hour. It was from Gleave to "dear Arthur Colquhoun," and it read:

My ward, Miss Pereira, has left Greystones on a visit to a friend—Lady Weybourne, in fact. As you have treated all of us, Lady Weybourne included, in a cavalier manner which I am at a loss to account for, I think it best that your visits here should cease. Allow me to express regret that some casual plans of mine should have wasted your time during the past few days. Of course, if you have been put to any additional expense a memorandum to Messrs. Smith, Son & Smith will receive immediate attention.

A first glance at this openly insulting message brought a flush of anger to Colquhoun's face. Then

he chuckled at the absurdity of the man's domineering attitude. Not yet, it would appear, had the encircling net come into view.

"I suppose you don't know what Mr. Gleave has written here?" he said, looking fixedly at Brook, who had asked him if there was any answer.

"No, sir," said the man, in a wooden way. Evidently he was prepared not to show surprise at anything said or done in Keynham just then.

"That's a pity," laughed Colquhoun. "I wanted you to hear my opinion of your master. Wait a couple of minutes. I must be equally courteous, and seal my reply."

He wrote, with the initial formality of a "Dear Sir":

The only Memorandum I have to submit to Messrs. Smith, Son & Smith is the enclosed cheque for £50, which I request you to forward.

Though he could ill afford the money he felt that a weight had been lifted off his mind when the cheque was safely wrapped up with its brief covering letter. Handing the envelope to the chauffeur, he essayed a harmless question.

"I hope Mr. Gleave is quite well after the disturbance at the Hall last night?" he said.

"My master looks the same as ever, sir. The switching on of the lights was nothing—a bit of an accident which can happen at any time where you have fuses an' dynamos."

"That's all right, Brook. I'm sorry I never had a run in that electric car of yours. It moves beautifully."

"Have you seen it, sir?"

"Why, of course. Wasn't it at Leyton yesterday?"

"Were you there, sir?"

"You know I was. You must have heard Mr. Gleave asking at the lodge which way I had gone."

Brook smiled in a peculiar way.

"I never pay any heed to what Mr. Gleave says about other people, sir. I just take my orders, an' carry 'em out."

"Capital. Good day!"

"Good day, sir."

He saluted, and strode off. Colquhoun remembered him quite well now——a well set-up and smart soldier. It certainly was most remarkable that a man so utterly apart from the average Briton of the upper class as Gleave should have bound these stolid fellows so closely to his interests. Even Hick had been loyal in his own way.

One thing, however, was made clear by this latest happening. It would never do to use the Keynham telephone for communicating with Evelyn. At the thought he hurried, bare-headed, to the call office at the Junction. He imagined that this might be a good hour to get hold of the one woman in the world without attracting too much attention at Leyton.

Therein, at least, he was right.

"What a miracle!" cried Evelyn's voice when the call was put through. "I was just passing through the hall when the bell rang, so took the message."

"These telepathic instances are rare but not unknown," he assured her.

"The next word is 'Tosh!' But it is odd you should have got hold of me at this minute. I'm going to pack. Auntie has discovered suddenly that we left London far too early in the season. Leyton will be dull for a couple of girls, she says, so we are off back to town by the ten o'clock express from Norwich tomorrow morning. . . . What did you say? . . . No. I didn't hear. Didn't want to. . . . Why, of course. You can write, just the same, and it's really easier to meet in London than here. . . . Rita is picking up already. I said 'picking,' not 'packing.' She's rather charming. Says she's horribly afraid of you know who, but cannot give

any sort of reason. No. I cannot possibly see you after dinner. I have far too much to look after. Now, mind you write; and take care of yourself. Rita says you ran all sorts of risks last night. I don't see why you shouldn't hop it from Keynham quite soon. You can do no good there. Yes. Lord Antony is coming, too. Auntie is nervous. Thinks we ought to have a man in the house, though Cæsar is worth a score of you. Can't stop another second. My address? Isn't it in the telephone book and half a dozen works of reference? Goodbye! Oh, hush!"

It is a noteworthy feature of telephonic conversations that, in many cases, a one-sided version is perfectly lucid. In this instance, of course, the lady had done most of the talking, and, on the whole, Colquhoun was satisfied with what he had heard. Judging from Gleave's note and Lady Weybourne's hurried departure it was permissible to assume that the Viscountess had not said an unnecessary word while getting Rita out of Greystones. In all probability Gleave was not yet aware of the projected flight to London. Evelyn herself might have been given the vaguest of accounts as to what took place during her aunt's visit to the Hall, but Sir Maurice could be trusted to secure a more detailed description. It was odd, by the way, but Evelyn had not mentioned him. Perhaps she deemed it wise to forget his existence. At best, he was a difficult person to discuss over the public telephone, especially in a district where his name was so well known.

So Colquhoun trudged back to Keynham in a fairly contented frame of mind. He was the poorer by fifty pounds—or would be when he had paid his reckoning at the inn—and far as ever from making that new start in life which was so essential to his future well-being. Yet he was happy. There was magic in the air. Perhaps the evil which seemed to emanate from Francis

Gleave was counterbalanced by a corresponding stream of good influences. As this young man in love walked along a fragrant country road that evening he pictured Gleave as he had last seen him, with distorted face and eyes gleaming in the moonlight like those of a predatory beast, and Evelyn, as he had last seen her, a radiant figure of youth and beauty shining in the noonday sun.

Is it to be wondered at that his thoughts should dwell on the girl, or that he should pay little heed at the moment to the strange vista opened up by Sir Maurice Gleave's story?

CHAPTER XX

MR. KNYVITT SPEAKS OUT

WALKING back the two miles to Keynham, Colquhoun reviewed at leisure some of the extraordinary statements made by Sir Maurice Gleave. If credible, they gave an altogether new aspect to his (Colquhoun's) personal affairs. Of course, Gleave might be hugging a delusion, in which case the whole structure of fact and theory would vanish in a court of law like a mirage from the horizon before the wind. But, as matters stood, Colquhoun felt he was not justified in regarding the story as a myth. It had elements which compelled recognition, not the least convicing being Lady Weybourne's attitude. It was not to be thought of that such a woman, proud, self-contained, born to that social status which her husband's wealth had consolidated, would capitulate so suddenly unless she knew it was highly probable that Maurice Gleave might be able to prove what he said.

So, then, leaving on one side the contention that Francis and not Maurice was responsible for a friend's death, it might be taken for granted that Francis Gleave's great wealth had been obtained by financial juggling with the bank's funds. If so, like every other criminal, he feared detection, and was ready to pay his half-brother a very large sum in hard cash the moment pressure was applied.

But Maurice Gleave had spoken of the bank manager as a partner in the enterprise, holding an eighth share, while he and Francis owned the remaining seven-eighths of the capital in the proportions of two-thirds

and one-third. In that case, why should not the dead partner's estate benefit? Did the bankruptcy proceedings wipe out his claim when assets regarded as worthless suddenly became of immense value?

That was a point for lawyers, and Arthur Colquhoun shared the belief of the man in the street that when the law got hold of such an involved case of misfeasance its ultimate decision would leave little for the litigants. But the definite fact remained that out of sheer ruin had come something more than prosperity —a veritable shower of gold which enabled Lady Weybourne's husband to purchase Leyton and Francis Gleave to spend hundreds of thousands on his hobbies and in restoring the glories of Greystones.

Then the young soldier, who had never before concentrated his reasoning faculties so intently on his own affairs, awoke to a notion which brought a whistle of astonishment to his lips. All along he had wondered why Scotland Yard was pushing him so determinedly into ever closer connection with the mystery attached to Greystones and its present owner. Did those shrewd detectives believe that through him, and through some legal action he might be persuaded to take, they could compel the mysterious Francis Gleave to come out into the open? The theory was not so far-fetched. It accounted for the whole chain of events once he, Colquhoun, had been thrown by chance into the company of Maurice Gleave on that quiet summer's evening in St. James's Park.

Indeed, the more he weighed the pros and cons of the problem, the less tenable became any other hypothesis. Maurice Gleave's action in writing from prison to the Criminal Investigation Department had paved the way for many things which seemed fantastic when viewed solely in retrospect. More ample knowledge established a natural and convincing sequence. Seen in that light, Francis Gleave's matrimonial plans

for Marita grew more understandable than ever. Here Lady Weybourne came on the stage again. Was not Francis Gleave's quick change of tone due to disillusionment caused by something her ladyship had blurted out during their interview at Leyton the previous day?

"By Jove!" said Colquhoun to himself, "this business takes a new turn every hour. How in the world will it eventuate? Shall I be kept dancing attendance at the Law Courts while Maurice and Francis fight what the newspapers call a *cause célèbre?* Shall I stalk through the columns of the illustrated press? And who'll pay the piper? I can see myself being broke to the wide before the year is out. Do people pay a witness's costs? And am I a witness, anyhow?"

He gave it up, but amused himself by arranging a series of searching and crafty questions wherewith to string Furneaux into fury.

Entering the village, he saw a car standing near the open door of a cottage. A trunk and a lady's hat-box were in position already by the side of the driver, and, before he reached the house, a young woman came out, accompanied by a sharp-looking man. The two entered the car, which turned in the roadway, thus bringing its occupants into full view. Colquhoun was surprised, without exactly knowing why, to find that the young woman was the telephone operator at the post-office.

Her face was flushed, and she had been crying. She hardly took any notice of an elderly dame who filled the doorway of the cottage, and waved a farewell. Indeed, it was quite obvious that Keynham had lost its telephone girl not only unexpectedly but with the maximum of inconvenience and, perhaps, distress to the person most concerned, namely, the lady herself.

In the inn there was news of Furneaux. He was bringing a friend in time for dinner, and wished an-

other bedroom to be reserved. Mr. Knyvitt sought advice as to what wine, if any, he was to place on the table. It is precisely on such trivialities that great issues may turn. The landlord was only considering the effect of the enlarged party on his guest's depleted stock, whereas Colquhoun had to decide instantly whether he would continue to accept any form of hospitality at the hands of a man whom he might now regard as an enemy.

"That's rather puzzling, Mr. Knyvitt," he said frankly. "It is Mr. Gleave's wine, and he and I have had a bad break. We never were friends, but things have turned out in such shape that I hope I shall never see him again. How, then, can I drink his champagne?"

Mr. Knyvitt closed a door leading from the bar into the back part of the hotel. The two were in the "snug," which was empty at that hour.

"Is that so, sir?" he inquired, obviously not questioning Colquhoun's veracity, but gaining time to marshal his own thoughts. "Well," he went on, "since you've said it, I'm glad. I never could understand how a proper young gentleman like you could get yourself mixed up with a wrong 'un like Francis Gleave."

Colquhoun did not point out that this favourable estimate of his qualities came rather late in the day to be of much service, but contented himself by remarking that Gleave was not so popular in the district as a man of his means might easily have become.

"Popular!" chuckled the other. "Why, sir, our people 'ate 'im."

Knyvitt did not drop his aspirates as a rule. The present instance lent a curious emphasis to his words.

"One wonders why," said Colquhoun. "So far as I can gather he keeps himself aloof from all local affairs."

"Don't you believe it, sir. That's just wot he doesn't do. He pays any price for parcels of freehold land

that come into the market. He won't allow a new house to be built or an old one to be repaired. 'Ave we a golf links? No. Mr. Gleave won't let the land for golf, though we have the makin's of a championship course within 'arf a mile of this very spot. Keynham could 'ave gone ahead by leaps and bounds since the War, but that pasty-faced blighter wants to see it a wilderness. And w'y? You've done more than most of us these past ten years—seen the inside of Greystones. Why do *you* think he's closin' down on all development?"

"Well, since you have been so candid I'll follow suit. I should imagine he does not care to be surrounded by new neighbours, some of whom might pry too closely into his affairs."

"That's right. You've hit it. But that's all over now, thank goodness. Your little friend, Mr. Furneaux, is after a bigger fish than any mackerel. I wasn't long in twiggin' that. Mr. Gleave is for it, and I do hope they catch him out. They've made a rare good start. The police took Hick out of the train at Norwich this morning. Less than an hour ago the Post-office people gev' our telephone girl about one minute to decide whether she'd take the sack or shift to Loughborough. She's just gone. You might have seen her leave in the car which brought an inspector and the young man who takes her place. An' while you were out afore lunch Lady Weybourne went to Greystones an' got that nice-lookin' young lady away. But, probably you know more about that than I do?"

"Meaning you have heard I was at Leyton at that time?"

"Oh, yes, sir. We don't miss much that goes on in the village. An' I was told who you met there, too. It was smart work to have that tell-tale girl taken off afore the thing reached her ears, which it was bound to do in some way this evenin', though not a soul in

Keynham except 'er would blab to Francis about Sir Maurice. Would you believe it? That blessed girl had the impidence to come 'ere at tea-time an' ax where you was. If our Mary 'ad said a word, which she didn't, the 'All would 'ave 'ad it in quick sticks."

"I am glad Mr. Furneaux has an ally in you, Mr. Knyvitt," Colquhoun ventured to say.

"I'd 'elp anyone to put that Gleave in quod," and the landlord drew two small gins vindictively, offering one to Colquhoun, which it was politic not to decline.

"That is easier said than done," was the soldier's next comment. "A man may be disliked—he may even be a thorough-paced scoundrel—but if he keeps inside the law there is no getting hold of him."

Knyvitt leaned forward impressively over the zinc-topped counter, and sank his voice to a hoarse whisper.

"All them there 'tecs 'ave to do is search both 'ouse an' grounds at Greystones," he muttered. "I can't say much—just why it don't matter. But you tell 'em that from me, though my name must be kep' out of it."

"I assure you Mr. Furneaux is to be trusted absolutely. He——"

"Here he is now," said Knyvitt, for the long, low window of the bar-parlour commanded a short stretch of the Norwich road. "I caught a glimpse of 'is 'at, an' he's the only gentleman I've seen this year wearin' a strawyard."

"May I let him know what you have said?"

"I don't care *'oo* knows my opinion of Mr. Francis Gleave," was the non-committal reply.

Colquhoun left it at that. The landlord had gone a long way already, and Furneaux would certainly not fail in bringing him the rest of the journey if he possessed any information of real value.

A big, burly, bullet-headed man stepped out of the car after Furneaux. It was Mr. Winter, and Colqu-

houn saw no reason why he should not say he was glad to see him.

"Feel a bit more confident now?" snapped the smaller representative of the C.I.D.

"Why, of course," smiled Colquhoun. "There's safety in numbers, you know."

"No. That is not the great thought flooding what you call your brain. You regard the Chief as being solid and stolid, the major virtues of every true-born Briton and prize bull. Oh, you belted warriors! You always rate brawn far above intelligence. You never even stop to think that all the really great commanders of armies and navies have been small men. Even Wellington was thin as a herring, and nothing like so tall as he is depicted."

"You may imagine," put in Winter cheerfully, "that we have had a row on the way from Norwich. That is not so. I merely applied a pin to certain bubbles of my friend's fancy, with this sad result."

"Your room is No. 10, sir," said Knyvitt. "Dinner will be ready in half an hour."

The Chief smiled at the diminutive landlord, who was not any bigger than Furneaux.

"Just what I wanted to hear," he said. "Breakfast at eight, with a nibble of biscuits and cheese at midday, permits of a reasonable appetite in the evening. . . . Yes. Those two bags are mine. By the way, there will be five for dinner, including Captain Colquhoun, I hope. Will that be all right?"

"Yes, sir. The joint is a leg o' lamb, an' there's plenty of fish to be had."

"Can we have a private room?"

"There's not another soul in the hotel, sir."

"That's bad—for you. Perhaps, if we find the fishing to our taste, we may alter all that in a few days' time."

Knyvitt, metaphorically, pricked his ears. So did

Colquhoun. The mere presence of the executive head of the C.I.D. augured stirring times in Keynham.

When the three men gathered in the smoking-room they found there Inspector Sheldon, in plain clothes, and a man whom Colquhoun thought he had seen before. The stranger was introduced as a Mr. Walter Bruce.

"I must be mistaken," said Colquhoun, "but I had a notion we met recently."

Mr. Bruce laughed.

"So we did," he said. "No longer ago than this morning. I am one of the policemen who accompanied Sheldon into the grounds at Greystones."

"Mr. Bruce," explained Winter, "is also a recognised authority on all forms of radio-activity."

"All known forms," corrected Bruce.

Furneaux tapped Sheldon on the chest.

"If the common or garden constable can lay claim to attainments of such eminence what may we not expect from the sergeant?" he cackled.

Sheldon pressed an electric bell.

"A practical demonstration," he said. "A mere movement of my thumb releases so many gram calories that in due course five cocktails will be on the table."

Colquhoun felt that no serious conversation would be practicable until the forthcoming meal was well on the way. He guessed, however, that Bruce, like Sheldon, was a temporary member of the County Constabulary.

"I'm wondering what the other constable who did duty this morning specialises in," he said.

"He was the only real policeman among us," admitted Sheldon. "He certainly knows more than I about rural law and order, because I've forgotten the regulations in vogue years ago. As for Mr. Bruce, he would be horribly puzzled by the most ordinary case of game trespass, and I'm sure he wouldn't know what

to do with a cow found grazing by the side of the road."

During dinner Colquhoun gathered that Sheldon and his scientific associate shared a spare bedroom in Wilkinson's cottage. They had been relieved for the night by three regulars of the Norfolk force. Gleave had raised no difficulty about their presence. He welcomed external protection, he said, and laid stress on the value of constables in uniform for preventing intrusion. And, indeed, the lodge-keeper had been greatly badgered that day by local newspaper correspondents. News editors in London and Norwich had awaked to the fact that something out of the common was taking place in that obscure corner of England. Shrewd eyes had seen possible columns in the brief sentence which described the loss of the yacht, while an equally short account of the midnight scare at Greystones focussed even closer attention on Francis Gleave and his peculiarities. Had the metropolitan dailies learnt of the presence in Norfolk of the three most noted men in the C.I.D., the "Fisherman's Rest" would have received an astonishing increase of patronage that night.

Colquhoun, by the way, noticed that Gleave's white wine was served with the soup, and two quarts of champagne from the same benefactor stood on the sideboard. He said nothing, even when Winter called attention to the singularly high quality of the vintages. But the Chief was a most unlikely person to let such a point pass. He watched the first glass of champagne creaming into amber liquid. A taste sufficed.

"Does Mr. Knyvitt stock this kind of stuff?" he demanded. "And what does he charge for it? Surely you are not indulging in wild extravagance on our account, Captain Colquhoun?"

This direct challenge compelled an admission. The soldier told how he had returned Mr. Gleave's money,

but that Knyvitt had evidently elected in favour of consuming the consignment of wine. He added, almost as a joke, that he had some reason to believe he owned more of the stock than he would ever drink.

Furneaux gave him a quick glance, and lifted his glass.

"Here's to the sacking of Gleave's cellars!" he cried.

"That will be no easy job," put in Bruce. "Such observation as I could make today, supplemented by a few furtive tests by a small instrument which measures the force, though not the distance, of wave lengths, convinced me that anyone who transgresses Mr. Gleave's household rules in letter, if not in spirit, will certainly be electrocuted."

"If he has set up man-traps there, that is directly contrary to the law," said Winter.

"But is it a man-trap if an inquisitive person stands on a lead mat and examines a microphone by touching it? I should say not."

"Are you sure such things exist?"

"I suspected about twenty of them, but made no personal test, as you may well believe. But I ran into a Scots gardener, and, as I can talk the Doric, soon had a friend. I expressed curiosity as to a microphone, placed inside a greenhouse where peaches are ripening already, and pretended to climb on to a bench, whence another step would lead to a lead-covered bracket obviously provided for examination of the microphone. I was pulled back by my friend. 'Man,' he cried, in real alarm, 'that was a fule thing ye were daein'. A puir de'il of a footman, wha kent a bit aboot what he c'a'd a crystal set i' wireless, tried that self-same thing three months gone, an' wad hae dee'd where he stood if I hadna knocked him off his perch. An', by the same token, I was pitched across the shed myself, just because I laid a han' on him.' Of course, the man was speaking the bare truth. I knew that well enough,

but made light of it. That particular microphone looked to be in good working order."

"Did you get inside the power-house?" said Colquhoun.

"No. Mr. Sheldon thought it would be a blunder to be too inquisitive the first day."

"It does not matter now," said Winter quietly. "Owing to a bit of belated but most valuable information supplied by Captain Colquhoun, some of our men today located a house in West Ealing which seems to act as a London receiving-station for Greystones. Gardhwar Singh visits there, as well as a gentleman named Moti Lal Prasad, and, though they have revealed nothing so far, a colleague of Mr. Bruce's, a Mr. Davidson, reports that the place is equipped with a remarkably powerful wireless installation on a principle absolutely new to him——"

"One moment!" broke in Bruce eagerly. "Before you tell us what Davidson discovered I would like to know if a series of large induction coils, connected and synchronised, are controlled, shall I say, by blocks of uranium mounted on leaden pedestals?"

"He cannot tell us," was the disconcerting answer. "The police were refused admission, so they broke in, as both Gardhwar Singh and Moti Lal Prasad can be deported, being wanted in Bombay on various charges. The warrants have been in our hands a year or more, but the India Office was willing to let sleeping dogs lie. However, as Gardhwar Singh could give no explanation of his presence on Gleave's yacht, we decided to act. To avoid creating too marked a disturbance my men attacked the back door. They were soon inside. As a precautionary measure they wore india-rubber boots and gloves, but whatever electrical power existed inside the place was destroyed in a few seconds by a chemical flame. Moti Lal was in charge, Gardhwar Singh being

under surveillance at a flat in the Bayswater-road, where they both live. The West Ealing establishment seems to have been used as a laboratory. Moti Lal was arrested, but he calmly asserts that the police caused the fire by forcible entry, while he and his associates, as inventors, were entirely within their rights in protecting their experimental plant from prying eyes. Confound it! I'm by no means sure he is not setting up a perfectly good defence."

"Not if his plant has been jamming authorised wireless all over the country," said Bruce.

The Chief shook his head.

"A hard thing to prove," he said, "when any novice can set every wireless installation within fifty miles whistling and groaning by his efforts to tune in. Don't imagine I am weakening in my belief that F. G. is a dangerous person. I'm sure he is. But there is no use in shutting our eyes to the chance of a fiasco, which is what the West Ealing raid may well have been."

"Was the house burnt down?" inquired Sheldon.

"Not a bit of it. The flame was localised to one room. It did its job and vanished. Davidson says that weeks of examination of the débris, combined with subsequent tests, may throw some light on the nature of the equipment, but that is all."

"We must wheedle Gleave out of Greystones before he takes fright," said Furneaux. "I wonder if Brother Maurice could lure him to Norwich?"

"No," announced Winter, biting the end off an excellent Havana with a certain viciousness. "Have you forgotten Hick's mission?" Noting the question in the faces of the others, he explained. "Hick was not discharged. He was well rated for being an infernal fool, but, on promise of good behaviour in future, was let off. He merely acted as though he were dismissed. He is now on his way to London to hire a steam yacht

ready for sea, which is to be in the private harbour here tonight, if possible—if not, tomorrow night. I saw no reason for stopping him. He undertook to let us know exactly what arrangements he makes. He is not trustworthy, of course. How could he be? But what are we to do? Spread a net for a Gleave and catch a Hick?"

"That remark would get a laugh in America."

The Chief turned an angry eye on Furneaux.

"It won't get any laugh from the Commissioner," he growled.

Colquhoun ventured to put in a remark.

"Before you turned up here this evening I heard something from Knyvitt," he said. "He dislikes his wealthy neighbour, and has information about Greystones which he did not give me, but he might pass it on under gentle pressure."

"Is Knyvitt a talker?"

"Just the reverse. I have found it difficult to squeeze a word out of him. But he is aware of all that is going on, and has lived here many years. Today, too, he was unusually outspoken. I think he will yield to Mr. Furneaux's blandishments."

"What a word! How little you know of me!"

Nevertheless, Furneaux went out.

Trade was brisk in the bar by this time, but Mrs. Knyvitt agreed to deputise for her husband, and the two men retired to the garden in rear of the hotel. The detective used no roundabout methods. He came straight to the point.

"I hear you can help the authorities to lay a great rascal by the heels," he said. "Tell me, in confidence, what you know and what you guess, but be sure and draw a line between the two."

Knyvitt was not to be hurried, though he had realised already that he would be questioned.

"Guessin' is no use," he replied, picking up a blade of grass and chewing the sweet stalk. "If I started guessin' about that chap," and he jerked a thumb in the direction of Greystones, "I'd never know when to stop."

"The police will attend to that, once we have something definite to go on."

"That's all right, sir. When I'm dealin' with gentlemen like you an' the captin, I can open my mouth. The trouble is that one thing leads to another. If I tole you that Mr. Francis Gleave's yacht has met a German steamer twenty or thirty miles out in a calm sea, an' taken stuff on board, there's folks not so far away as 'ud make it their business to inquire how *I* came to know such things."

Furneaux smiled joyously.

"Mr. Knyvitt," he said, "before you go one inch farther let me speak plainly. It is no part of my duty to assist prying fellows in the Customs and Inland Revenue. They can be most annoying. Of course, we all admit that taxes and duties must be paid, but when peaceful citizens like you and me get hold of a bottle of decent French rum or a box of Dutch cigars it's nothing short of scandal that we should be fined five or six times the value because some nosey official searches our baggage or empties a skip of herrings on the quay-side."

The landlord made up his mind.

"You gimme your word you'll keep mum about me," he said, with the husky voice of one who has a secret to disclose.

"It is given," said Furneaux.

"Well, three or four times in the last eighteen months that there yacht of Gleave's picked up tons of heavy cases at sea, an' they're stored in a cave at the top of the cove where the yacht lies. What's in 'em? They're

marked 'Glass—with care,' but they ain't no glass. A friend of mine, no matter what's his name, 'oo had bin a prisoner of war in Germany, recognised the way them boxes were made an' hooped, an' he's sure they contain high explosive—the stuff the Zepps used in incendiary bombs."

"Which cave? There are two."

"Oh, you know that? Well, never mind the old smugglers' doors outside. They're a blind. You'd need a pick-axe to open 'em, and then come on a raft of ships' timbers. No, the way in is through a passage high up in the centre of the tunnel, which is closed by a steel door. From what I've heard about the remainder of Greystones anyone who forced that door would be blown to Kingdom Come together with half the cliff overhead. It's queer that men like the skipper an' crew of the yacht should lend theirselves to such doin's, but they were well paid, had a soft job, an' were told that Mr. Gleave had to import all sorts of material for his experiments in wireless—not the wireless we read about, but another kind, that drives engines. He made out that his plant would be spied on an' his inventions stolen if the big manufacturin' companies got wind of it. But that's their affair—not mine. Howsumever, you see how Gleave had 'em under his thumb when they'd open the sea-cocks in a fine craft an' sink 'er the minnit they were tackled by a warship. I'll bet you they had a cargo in the hold the other night, so obeyed orders, an' down she went."

"It seems to me," said Furneaux, speaking with marked seriousness, "that you have supplied the one thing lacking—a charge on which Gleave can be arrested. A good deal will follow. Captain Colquhoun believes you don't say much, Mr. Knyvitt, but you have said a lot tonight. Yet, how is it that the local police were kept in the dark?"

Knyvitt shrugged his shoulders.

"What do them fellows know?" he said sarcastically. "Poor ole Wilkinson, a decent chap enough, spends 'is time trappin' motorists an' seein' that every pub opens an' closes at the reggelation hours. His head would buzz if you talked to 'im about wireless."

CHAPTER XXI

THE CRASH

So Furneaux had news for his colleagues when he returned. Winter, in particular, was elated.

"Now we have him!" he chortled. "Early tomorrow we'll 'phone Norwich for a search warrant. Once inside that house and it will be a strange piece of luck for Master Francis if he does not succeed his half-brother in penal servitude, at least."

Mr. Bruce looked surprised.

"Interference with wireless, even on a wholesale scale, is hardly an offence of that magnitude," he said. "Of course, the storing of high explosive is a serious matter, but what if he shows that he uses it in some way? The man is undoubtedly a scientist of real attainment. We are practically convinced now that he has allied radium, in some of its many compounds, to a series of tremendously efficient induction coils. Years ago we knew how to manufacture lightning. Suppose Mr. Gleave can produce and harness it on the majestic scale. It is done up aloft by simple natural forces. Why not on earth?"

"I'm not worrying about lightning," smiled the Chief. "From what I read of the thunderstorms which take place higher up I recognise with humbleness the limits of my department. Gleave is a genius with a criminal complex. I am personally acquainted with a round dozen of such phenomenal creatures who are now usefully employed at Portland or on Dartmoor."

Colquhoun smoked his pipe in silence. He knew Furneaux was watching him, but not a word did he

utter until the uncanny little man shot a question at him.

"Sir Maurice Gleave told us before we left Norwich this evening that you and he had a long talk at Leyton. It was not about wireless, I suppose?"

"No. That subject did not crop up."

"He, of course, was interested solely in what happened eleven years ago?"

"Yes. He almost convinced me."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that. Your mental horizon is widening hourly. Did you have a word with Miss Hilton?"

"Several words. I saw her at Leyton, and 'phoned her about five o'clock. She was then packing. Lady Weybourne is taking her and Marita Pereira to London by an early train tomorrow."

"Great Scott! Does Sir Maurice know that?"

"Probably not, but Miss Hilton did not mention him."

"Since you are so full of hidden information, may I ask if Francis is aware of it?"

"That, of course, I cannot say. Judging by Lady Weybourne's ready compliance with Sir Maurice's wishes I should imagine that France Gleave is now the last person living in whom she would confide. The man has frightened her. It was extraordinarily plucky of her to face him this morning and get Marita away."

"Every woman has a superb nerve when she is saving her own skin," snapped Furneaux, who seemed by no means pleased by this new development. He admitted later that he was looking forward to a battle of wits with Lady Weybourne, whom he credited with far more duplicity than Colquhoun had any reason to suspect.

"If she fears Francis Gleave isn't it natural that she should wish to leave a house which is so close to Greystones?" Colquhoun ventured to inquire.

"She came here quickly enough. I don't believe in these rapid conversions."

"Then you must condemn me, too. Sir Maurice Gleave declares that Francis murdered my father. I have come round to his way of thinking. More than that, it is highly probable that you gentlemen from Scotland Yard share his view. As Mr. Winter put it, he cannot deal with lightning but he can handle a criminal. If I knew what you know I would understand more clearly why you are so anxious to search his house and go thoroughly into his affairs."

Furneaux spun round on Mr. Bruce.

"Has thought transference any connection with radio-activity?" he asked.

"Possibly," was the surprising reply. "Who can say where widely differing branches of scientific investigation may meet? I have a pet belief that the human body contains not only every invention yet made but all that will ever be made. Today we are in the infancy of research into the mysteries of electrical impulse. I see no reason why a length of wire should be more susceptible to ethereal waves than the human backbone. The only distinction is that we have learnt how to utilise the wire but not the nervous system of a far more efficient living instrument."

"Gleave holds that the Eastern mind is better fitted than ours to grapple with scientific problems," said Colquhoun. "He claims that it is emancipated by long centuries of philosophic calm, and therefore takes nothing for granted while regarding nothing as impossible. I met no such advanced thinkers in India. Are there any known to you?"

"One hears vaguely of a few. A Bengali has evolved a remarkable theory affecting life in metals. Gardhwar Singh, mentioned this evening, promised to do good work in Bombay, but, to all appearance, lost himself in politics. I would like very much to have a

heart-to-heart talk with Mr. Francis Gleave, even in Portland Prison."

The Chief rose.

"This discussion is too high-brow for me," he said. "Furneaux pretends to understand it. I don't. Before the light fails altogether I'd like to have a look at Greystones. The moon does not rise till midnight, and by that time I hope to be in bed. You and Sheldon, Mr. Bruce, may be in uniform again tomorrow, so you had better not be seen with us in public. Will you guide me, Captain Colquhoun? How about you, Frog?"

The village street was clear of loungers when the party broke up and went its separate ways. Winter had not hurried over a somewhat belated meal, as he wanted to remain unnoticed until the inn was empty of its local frequenters.

The sun had set long since. The last hour of a quite delightful summer's day had nearly sped, but Greystones and its sheltering cliffs were still silhouetted with remarkable clearness against the reflected light which the eastern rim of a smooth sea always displays in such weather.

Although Winter had seen the house from the Norwich road he could hardly take in its details from a fast-moving car, so he eyed it now with an interest he did not try to conceal.

"It looks a charming place, though it stands in a rather unorthodox position," he said. "Of course, it faces south, and that is all right for the gardens, but, as a first impression, I would say that Greystones was built to defy the law of the land. Apparently, it has maintained its evil purpose for a hundred and fifty years or more. I well remember the row which sprang up in this part of Norfolk when the German tenant was dislodged in the early autumn of 1914. That was the beginning of the spy fever. It was just an in-

stance of the Hun's queer mentality that he should select a remote and exposed building like this as offering a secret way into and out of the country. It makes my blood boil even now when I think of the low level at which he rated our intelligence."

"May I ask if Francis Gleave ever came under observation as a person whose loyalty could not be depended on?" inquired Colquhoun.

"Not in regard to the War. In fact, rather the opposite. He wrote several monographs on sound detection and directional wireless which, I regret to say, were pigeon-holed by the War Office as the productions of a crank. By sheer good luck they were preserved, and Bruce went through them recently at the request of the Home Office. He says they were just ten years before their time. They are extraordinarily interesting today. Bruce vows that if Gleave had been listened to then the German U-boat campaign would have been a complete failure instead of proving, as it did, a ghastly peril. It was not until 1918 that Gleave's name figured rather frequently in the Secret Service records of the India Office. His sympathies seem to be Eastern rather than European. Still, there was nothing overt, merely friendship with suspected Indians. Even then, his association with native thought was apparently scientific and literary."

"He has a splendid library of Eastern books, and is immensely proud of it."

"A strange being! I look forward to meeting him tomorrow, though I lead him away in chains."

"Ah, the Chief is a terrible fellow when roused," chirped Furneaux enthusiastically. "It runs in the blood. Theodore Hook described one of his ancestors in immortal lines:

> Mr. Winter's a man will stand no kind of flummery;
> His name may be Winter but his process is summary.

Perhaps, as verse, they may not rank high, but the basic thought is profound. If you doubt me, ask the lads at Bow-street and the Old Bailey."

After that they walked in silence. Never was interruption more ill-timed. Colquhoun felt he wanted to twist the impish little man's ear. Yet, a few seconds later, an incident occurred which seemed to warrant Furneaux's too-successful effort to stifle the Chief's reminiscences.

The surface of the white road rendered anyone moving over it visible for a considerable distance, though trees and hedges and fields were now merging in the deepening gloom of night. A woman was approaching. She had just cleared the boundary wall of the estate when she screamed, broke into a run, and then halted. A policeman had popped up from the centre of a clump of briars.

"Yes. I thought so," said Furneaux. "Mrs. Jenkins has just left the Hall after her first half day's work there, and some country cop has nearly scared the life out of her. He saw her come out, and has neither eyes nor ears for three desperate-looking crooks like us. *Cré nom!* I've a good mind to steal up and pinch his truncheon."

Meanwhile Mrs. Jenkins was explaining, rather shrilly, that she was employed at Greystones as temporary housekeeper, and was now on her way home. The policeman seemed unwilling to believe. He demanded her name and address. Furneaux hurried up, obviously to the lady's great relief.

"Oh, sir," she cried, "do tell this man to leave me alone. Someone should have warned him I was coming out at ten o'clock."

"Certainly. Where is Wilkinson?" This to the policeman.

"Never mind where Wilkinson is. Who may *you* be?"

The sentry tried to emerge from his bed of thorns with dignified haste, but failed. Indeed, he tripped ignominiously, a fact which was not altogether helpful.

Of course, the man was only acting in accordance with orders, and Furneaux knew this full well, so, for once in his career, he allowed an opportunity to pass.

"I am Mr. Furneaux, of the C.I.D.," he said. "Though you are a stranger here you surely have heard of me."

The policeman came closer.

"Yes, I've heard of a Mr. Furneaux, and—you sort of measure up to his description, but I can't take your say-so at this hour of the night. An' who are these other gentlemen?"

Furneaux caught Winter's laugh, yet once again he bottled his wrath.

"I don't want to display my warrant in the glare of a torch," he said. "Wilkinson must be close at hand. Why don't you signal him? Three quiet taps on the trunk of a tree, or any other round wooden object which may be more immediately accessible, will bring either him or the nearest man."

The policeman was so surprised at such intimate knowledge of his instructions that he failed to catch the personal allusion. Luckily, Wilkinson himself had heard the voices, and now hurried up. He saluted.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said. Then, turning to Mrs. Jenkins, he apologised for not having escorted her out of the guarded area.

"I sawr you leavin' the Hall, ma'm," he explained, "an' was just goin' to hurry after you when we spotted a light at the front door. Someone came out, it might have been to listen to the gate, an' I thought it best to hang on."

"That gate needs no listenin' to," said Mrs. Jenkins, recovering her wits speedily now that she was identified. "That's all done inside the house. One of them p'lice-

men in the grounds was stannin' on the lawn, a' mebbe Mr. Gleave hisself is havin' a chat with him. He's bin mortal uneasy all the afternoon an' evenin'. I'm sure he's packin' things."

"Clothes?"

Mrs. Jenkins gazed doubtfully at Winter, whom she did not know. Furneaux introduced him with becoming gravity.

"No, sir," she said. "He's not in that part of the house. He's bin in what he calls—something——"

"The laboratory."

"That's it. Bluebeard's den, the maids say it is. They're never allowed even a peep at it."

"Is he using packing-cases or trunks?"

"Nothing has gone in or out, to my knowledge, sir. But the room's over the library, an' by listenin' carefully, I heard heavy things being moved. I was goin' to call in at Knyvitt's on my way home, an' tell Mr. Furneaux."

"Anything else?"

"He spent some time this mornin' in testin' electric bells an' lights. I wasn't there then, of course, but the servants were whisperin' about it. They said he was like a cat on hot bricks after Lady Weybourne left with Miss Pereira."

"That all?"

"All I could pick up today, sir. Tomorrow I go in at ten to check the household stores. The waste that's bin goin' on there is somethink orful."

"Did Mr. Gleave welcome your offer of assistance?"

"Yes, sir. He said he preferred servants who knew him an' his family. He began by axin' how I had heard of Mr. Hick's dismissal, so I up an' tole him it was common talk in the village, an' that was why I offered."

"How many people are there in the house now?"

"All of twenty, or more."

"Twenty!"

"There's four men-servants, an' three housemaids, a French cook an' his kitchen-man, six gardeners, three engineers, a chauffeur an' a valet. That's not countin' Miss Pereira's maid, who left with her lady's belongings at tea-time, or the man an' his wife who live at the lodge. Then——"

The testimony of that valuable witness was never completed. A blinding light leaped to the sky from the cliff behind the house, and was followed almost instantaneously by the most terrific explosion which anyone in that locality had ever heard, though there were men on duty that night who had watched Mount Kemmel go up in the flame of many tons of T.N.T. and to whose ears the shattering burst of a "Black Maria" was but too familiar. That rending crash seemed to tear the very firmament. The earth itself might have been rent asunder by volcanic force, and the tortured air surged in frantic gusts as if some unexampled storm had sprung into full fury with the speed of sound.

Mrs. Jenkins and Furneaux were knocked flat on the road. The others staggered and nearly fell, and the general confusion was added to by the impenetrable pall of darkness which blotted out the landscape, and left on the bemused senses the paralysing effect of total blindness.

After an interval which appeared to last for minutes but might hardly be measured by seconds, Colquhoun's soldierly training came to his aid. He knew that a few feet distant on the left side of the road a great oak flung its tangle of branches over a wide area.

"Someone show a light and all make for the tree," he shouted in the strong clear voice of the parade-ground. "Hurry! Falling stones!"

The Chief responded. His electric torch flashed. Then one of the policemen followed his example. Furneaux picked himself up, and stumbled over Mrs. Jen-

kins's body. With a surprising strength in one so small of limb he lifted and carried her into comparative safety. They all huddled close to the massive trunk, and were not the tick of a clock too soon, because masses of rock, small boulders, pebbles and great clods of earth began thudding to earth on fields and roadway, or smashed into the more lofty boughs of the tree, thence flying in all directions. Few dropped closed to the sturdy bole. The five men were hit by small stones but suffered no serious injury, while the hardly conscious woman was not touched at all.

The bombardment soon ceased, and the air cleared a little, though it was a good hour or longer before the rising moon broke through the cloud of dust which that tremendous blast had driven high above a wide periphery.

The little group beneath the tree gave hardly a thought to the certain result of such a disturbance elsewhere. Nearly every window in Keynham was broken, old chimneys were dislodged, and comparatively fragile structures like sheds and hay-mews unroofed. People in Norwich, many miles away, heard the bang and felt the atmospheric disturbance. They imagined it was the repercussion of some thunderstorm far out at sea.

Evidently, Mrs. Jenkins came of a hardy race. She recovered quickly. Winter had detailed P. C. Wilkinson to see her home, and, if he met Sheldon and Bruce, to tell them he would be at the Hall, when the farmer's wife announced that she was quite capable of going alone to the village, and would convey the Chief's message. It was only a deserved compliment that she should be trusted, so the men hurried to the gate. It was open. The police stationed in the vicinity had seen to that, while some hysterical women and almost equally alarmed men, many being scantily clad, were streaming down through the grounds toward the exit.

Winter stopped them, caused the gate to be closed,

and stationed Wilkinson there, with two other men, their orders being to admit no one not authorised to enter and allow no person, in any circumstances, to go out without his personal sanction. He ascertained that Gleave himself was yet in or near the house, so, mustering the available force, which now consisted of six uniformed police, with Furneaux and Colquhoun, he made for the building.

There was no light anywhere. It might be taken for granted that the electrical equipment of Greystones was ruined. Indeed, one of the constables who had been watching the main gate told that simultaneously with the explosion every lamp in the exterior casings of door and windows had flared into an intense brilliance and then died out. In a word, every wire had fused in a multiplicity of short circuits.

Plenty of electric torches were available, and Colquhoun could lead the way through the grounds without following the curved drive. Without much loss of time, therefore, the party reached the open space in front of the house. There they found a policeman, one of the three told off for duty there. He was unhurt, but so stupefied that he hardly knew what he was saying. Indeed, he sought information rather than gave it. But he had seen Francis Gleave going back into the building, which, under such inspection as was possible, seemed to have escaped any vital damage. Indeed few of the south windows showed any sign of the destruction wrought far a-field, though it was discovered a little later that parts of the roof were blown off and every window on the north and east faces driven in.

The front door was open, and remained so until it was dislodged with crowbars next day, a fact which proved that it was controlled by some mechanism other than the rollers on which it moved ostensibly, a control

which kept it rigid in the position it occupied at the moment of the explosion.

"Do you know for certain which of the upper rooms is the laboratory?" whispered Winter to Colquhoun, when they stood in the spacious entrance hall, and could survey the various doors, all shut tight, which led to the library, dining-room and the remainder of the ground floor.

"From what I was told, that must be it," and the soldier pointed to a doorway at the end of a cross gallery to which the main staircase led in two broad flights.

At that moment Gleave appeared. He came out on the landing, and the door shut behind him with a sharp click. Evidently his eyes were dazzled by the gleam of the torches beneath.

"Are you people down there policemen?" he said, and both Colquhoun and Furneaux knew at once that he was completely master of himself. Even Winter, who had visualised the man accurately enough, was surprised at such utter detachment of voice and manner. It was he who answered with a curt "Yes."

"Will you, then, be good enough to take those lights from off my face?—I wish to come down," purred Gleave, elaborately polite.

"It is more to the point that we wish to come up," said the Chief sternly. Suiting the action to the word he ran up the stairs with a nimbleness which his great stature and seemingly heavy limbs gave no prior hint of.

"Keep your hands away from your pockets, Gleave!" cried Furneaux. "At the least sign of any attempt to draw one of those pistols you will be shot without warning."

"Ah," said Gleave, leaning easily on a bannister rail, "I recognise you, at any rate. And who may you be?"

he added, turning his head to look at Winter, now on the upper landing.

"I am a Superintendent of the Criminal Investigation Department," said the Chief. "It will simplify matters if you unlock that door which you have just closed. Recent events here and in London render it necessary that the whole of your house, and especially that room, shall be examined thoroughly."

"One may ask why, I suppose?"

"Certainly. There is grave suspicion that you have engaged in illegal practices on these premises and elsewhere. Their nature will be set forth in sufficient detail when you are charged under a warrant which will be issued tomorrow. Meanwhile, I warn you that you are arrested now, and any sort of resistance will be the height of folly on your part."

A crash of glass and a rush of running feet through the front door heralded a shout from Sheldon:

"The house is on fire, Chief! Take care you are not caught in a trap!"

Winter would not have credited that alarming statement from anyone except a trusted member of his own staff. There was not the least sign of a fire internally. The atmosphere was still laden with the fumes of the explosion which had generated some gas he was not acquainted with, but the effects were less perceptible inside the house than in the open air.

It was the imperturbable Gleave who answered.

"No one is in any danger," he said calmly. "A part of the house—one room, in fact—is being gutted at the moment by a chemical agent which, once its purpose is achieved, releases its own antidote. Behind this steel door, which you cannot possibly open without crowbars and sledge-hammers, a fire approximating to 4,000° Fahrenheit has been raging during the past minute. It will not spread. Indeed, it is now being extinguished. I advise you, however, not to try and

enter by door or window until the place has cooled down, which will be soon, as the glass blew out of the remaining windows just as your reinforcements arrived. But, really, isn't it rather ridiculous that we should remain here making speeches at one another? Suppose we descend, and find lights? Are any of my servants present? Let them bring candles from the kitchen. All the electric fittings are useless because of the action of two of your own policemen, Mr. Superintendent."

Some men in Winter's position just then might have felt that Gleave was quite adroitly and even successfully putting him in the wrong. But he opposed the genius of commonsense to the genius of insanity. He knew that Gleave was adhering stubbornly to the plea that in destroying his own property without risk to life or limb he was merely acting in defence of inventions not yet patented. Very well—let him hug that delusion. All the less would he be prepared for the real charge he would have to face if some evidence still lacking could be secured.

So the Chief did not answer. He strode past Gleave with a superb disregard for any personal risk he might be incurring. Pressing the door with a foot he ascertained that it was rigid, and already there was an oven-like heat seeping through its steel plates, while some highly disagreeable vapour was oozing through crevices at top and sides.

"Evidently," he said, approaching with a remarkable suddenness the man still resting against the rail, "you have adopted the same means here to conceal your unauthorised wireless installation as your associates, Gardhwar Singh and Moti Lal Prasad, took at West Ealing. Hold your hands up! I want those automatics. Now, go below! I shall question you later, but it is my duty to make you understand clearly that anything you may say will be recorded, and may be used in evidence against you."

Gleave submitted without a word of protest. He sat on a chair in the hall, and seemed to pay no heed to a hasty examination of the main reception rooms, which Winter and Sheldon conducted as best they could with electric torches. Furneaux had gone out, taking Colquhoun and Mr. Bruce with him, and his colleagues assumed that he was trying to locate the exact scene of the explosion.

Sheldon told how he and Bruce had hurried from the village, leaving it in a state bordering on frenzy, because every window and many doors had been blown in, and some old houses shaken to danger point. They had met Mrs. Jenkins, and her story sent them along at a run. Coming through the gardens, with which Sheldon was now thoroughly familiar, they saw a vivid flame spring up behind the windows of the "wireless" room on the first floor of the east wing, and guessed instantly what was happening. Facing south, these windows had escaped the air pressure, but they yielded to heat, as Gleave had stated quite accurately.

When the Chief returned to the entrance hall he found that several candles had been provided, one of the local policemen having got hold of Brook, the chauffeur, and persuaded him that in supplying more light he was only carrying out his master's wishes.

Gleave was still seated. He looked worn and fragile, yet utterly shut off in mind from his surroundings. His ascetic face might have been carved out of yellowed ivory. He was in evening dress, with the velvet jacket he affected. His knees were crossed and his arms folded. He showed no interest whatsoever in the comings and goings of others. His attitude suggested that he awaited with unruffled composure any action these stupid officials might decide to take.

Winter glanced at his small cohort.

"Where is the man who was on duty here?" he de-

manded. "I mean the constable I spoke to when I crossed the lawn."

There was no answer.

"Surely some of you know who he was," he went on.

"Yes, sir," said a sergeant. "His name is Baines."

"Well, bring him here. I want him at once. And where are the others? There were three men on duty, I understand."

Then Gleave lifted his sombre eyes.

"Two must be dead," he said. "I was talking to Baines, if he be the third, when my stock of chemicals was blown up. It is quite evident that the other unfortunates tried to force an entry into a place quite efficiently protected from all priers and peepers. They probably discovered the passage leading from the centre of the tunnel, and tampered with the door leading to the store-room. It is not my fault. It is theirs—theirs and yours, Mr. Superintendent. If you sought an explanation of my activities, why did you not come direct to me? On your shoulders, not on mine, rests the responsibility for the death of those two men. I asked for police protection. You gave me police espionage. If justice still reigns in England it is you, not I, who should be under arrest."

CHAPTER XXII

THE SETTLEMENT

AGAIN the Chief ignored the principal actor in this strange scene. He refused to pander to that personal vanity which is a marked characteristic of a certain type of criminal mind. If Gleave's armour of self-conceit were pierced by official contempt he might be stung into active annoyance and keep on talking. That was what Winter wanted—to learn what this man most dreaded. Gleave's questions, even his cynical comments, might reveal the trend of thoughts which he regarded as safely hidden behind the impenetrable screen of his own acute intelligence.

And, indeed, some leaven of unrest was at work in that abnormal mind, because, after waiting for the reply which came not, he said suavely:

"I dislike anonymity, Mr. Superintendent. Will you favour me with your name?"

"Oh, yes; you are acquainted with it already. It is Winter," said the Chief.

"Ah, of course. You replied to my letters. I ought to have remembered. My excuse is that the brain does not function well after such a physical shock as I have just experienced. For all that, I am more than ever surprised at your attitude. You, of all men, must be aware of certain precautions I adopted to secure my personal safety, and that which I value far more, the safe-guarding of my scientific discoveries."

"My attitude, as you describe my disinclination to enter into an argument, is wholly in your own interests. Must I warn you a second time that anything you say

may be used to your detriment when you are brought to trial?"

Gleave raised a delicate hand in a gesture of distaste.

"You deal in stock phrases, Mr. Winter. Warrants, charges, evidence, trial—these shibboleths leave me cold. I am striving to drum into your departmental ear that I shall figure as the plaintiff, not the defendant. You have been misled outrageously. I have not the least doubt that my half-brother, Sir Maurice, is the responsible agent, but you ought to realise that the judicial system which declared him a felon will be slow to accept his testimony in abstruse matters where his ignorance is abysmal."

Winter moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue. Gleave had reached the danger-point more quickly than he hoped or anticipated.

"Sir Maurice may have cultivated certain branches of knowledge during the past eleven years," he allowed himself to say.

"Strange!" commented Gleave, with a quiet laugh. "Do our penal settlements, then, rank with our universities?"

Furneaux and Bruce came in. With them was P. C. Baines. Though badly shaken, the man had recovered his wits. The average country policeman recognises no mean between physical fitness and complete unconsciousness or death.

"Well?" said the Chief, looking at Furneaux.

"The explosive, tons of it, was stored in the cave at the head of the ravine," reported his colleague. "Nearly the whole of the small harbour is choked with the *débris* of both sides of the cliff. The tunnel has caved in. Two policemen are killed. It may be almost impossible to identify the separate parts of their bodies, but I have recovered their metal numbers, so we know for certain that both are dead."

Winter turned at once to Baines.

"What were you and Mr. Gleave discussing before the explosion took place?" he inquired.

"Mr. Gleave came out and asked me where the other men were, sir."

"Did you know?"

"Not exactly, sir. I had an idea they were in the tunnel. I suppose——"

"Tell me only what you are certain of—unless, that is, you suggested to Mr. Gleave some reason for your belief."

"No, sir. I did not. J just told him they had gone in that direction. We patrolled the whole of the grounds, back and front, every half hour, and one of us stood fast on the lawn. It was my turn to remain there as a fixed point."

"What did Mr. Gleave say then?"

"He asked me if I had seen any cats in the garden. I thought it a queer sort of question, but I said I hadn't. Then the bang came. It knocked me clean over. I was dazed by the light and the wind of it. Mr. Gleave fell, too, I think."

"I did more than fall—I was blown many feet across the lawn," put in Gleave composedly.

"I'm pretty sure I saw Mr. Gleave make a funny jump sideways," went on the policeman, "but the whole affair was so sudden that I took a fair knock-out—just for a minnit or so. I'm all right again now."

The Chief looked at Gleave in silence, and the eyes of the two men clashed with the meditative and weighing scrutiny which presages a mortal struggle between well-matched opponents. The next move must be a decisive one. Each knew that. Each suspected the other of possessing weapons not revealed hitherto—not those tangible forgings of steel which can shoot or stab, but the more deadly armament supplied by im-

partial laws for the utter undoing or triumphant escape of the malefactor.

The night was extraordinarily still. Externally a faint radiance outlined the tops of trees and the crests of distant hills, but at ground level the dust in the air steeped all objects in darkness. The moon would not rise until midnight, and the hour was now about half past ten. From the main road came sounds which showed that a crowd had gathered, and was being constantly augmented by new arrivals on foot and in cars. The whole countryside was roused. There was an increasing murmur of voices. Winter was aware rather suddenly that Norfolk might be growing tired of Francis Gleave and his peculiarities. What if the gates were carried by storm?

"Is the guard at the lodge strong enough to hold back a mob?" he asked a sergeant who had accompanied Baines.

"Yes, sir, I think so," was the answer. "Four of our men have just arrived, and others will be coming on motorcycles every minute."

"Form a cordon in front of the gate, so as to prevent a combined rush. Tell off a couple of constables to mix with the people and assure them that nothing more will happen here tonight. A fire broke out, but it has been extinguished. It is absolutely impossible for anyone to state what has really occurred. We shall not know till daylight, if then. Should you be worried by reporters, say that Mr. Furneaux or I, or both, will meet them at 'The Fisherman's Rest' within the next hour. Is the superintendent's car here?"

"Yes, sir. The chauffeur brought it from the village. He thought you might need it. I had it put inside the gate before the crowd got too thick."

"Capital. Will you send it up here at once? And try your best to persuade the people to go home. Come back in fifteen minutes and report progress."

The sergeant saluted, and hurried out. Winter turned to Gleave.

"For your own safety," he said, "I purpose taking you to Norwich. If you name one of your servants, I'll get a bag packed with such clothing as you may require."

"Can you not trust me to do that for myself?" snarled Gleave, whose temper was rising.

"No. You must remain where you are until the car is ready."

A steamer hooted at no great distance. Instantly all those in the secret of Hick's mission assumed that he had chartered some vessel at Harwich or other neighbouring port—else it could not have reached Greystones so quickly. It was most unlikely that any boat not having special business off that part of the coast would be in the Wash and close inshore.

Gleave stood up.

"In that case—" he began.

It will never be known what he was actually going to say. In all probability, as shall be seen, he meant first to taunt and then defeat the police, because he did not believe they would dare shoot him. But from the doorway came a threatening growl, and a large dog, of the hound type, galloped in, his nails grating loudly on the parquet floor. A woman's voice screamed "Cæsar! Cæsar! Come here, Cæsar!" and Colquhoun, also shouting the animal's name, appeared in close pursuit.

Four candles were distributed about the large hall, but their feeble light failed to lend any real clarity to the interior. The cross gallery, beneath which Gleave had been sitting, was fourteen feet above the level of the floor, and the groined roof of the hall another ten feet higher. Moreover, staircase and wainscot were of dark oak. Such surroundings made for gloom.

It was impossible, therefore, to distinguish the exact

sequence of events in a thrilling scene which began and ended in a few seconds. The dog bounded across the floor, evidently bent on attacking Gleave, who sprang on to the chair from which he had just risen, and, as it appeared to the startled vision of the onlookers, assumed a posture of defence which could be compared only with that of a huge cat ready to fight with teeth and claws. Cæsar gathered himself for a spring, but slipped on the polished wood, and slithered too far. He recovered quickly, too quickly for Colquhoun, who missed seizing his collar, but Gleave used the respite just as any active cat would have done. Turning, and planting his right foot on the back of the chair, he made a phenomenal leap, or scramble, as it might be described more accurately, for scratches were found later in the oak panels fully four feet above the top of the chair, which, being of an ornamental variety, was itself some three feet in height.

How the frenzied man contrived to scale that smooth wall, its surface broken only by rounded mouldings not half an inch in depth, could not be ascertained. Sheldon, an experienced rock-climber in his native Cumberland, declared the feat impracticable, though Gleave had shown it was not impossible. As it was, his fingers barely failed to clutch the uprights of the guarding rail, and he fell back.

Cæsar was ready, and sprang again, but Colquhoun was equally determined, and had him now in an irresistible grip. Luckily, subsequent examination proved beyond dispute that the dog had never sunk his teeth in the flesh of one whom he was striving to destroy at first sight, because there was no room for doubt that man and dog had never been close to each other before. In fact, they were in the same locality once only, and that was when Gleave visited Leyton, Cæsar being then in the park with his mistress, some hundreds of yards away.

But the infuriated animal did contrive to seize the side of Gleave's velvet coat as its wearer's feet struck the chair, and he was thrown violently to the floor. The material ripped, though it held for a fraction of a second, so the man's body was twisted by the pull. Colquhoun held on valiantly, dragging the dog well away, but Furneaux also seemed to lose his senses, because he leaped at Gleave, now wriggling on the slippery surface of the parquet, and obviously unable to rise. Yet the detective hurled himself on top of the prostrate man as though he meant to carry on the attack, and shouted in a shrill falsetto:

"Show a torch here—quick!"

Sheldon was close at hand, and the vivid beam of an electric lamp revealed what was going on. Gleave was flat on his back. Furneaux had clutched both his wrists, holding his right arm pinioned by his side and the left almost straight out. Gleave had ceased to struggle. Indeed his body was utterly relaxed, but his new assailant still maintained that paralysing grip. The two faces were close together. Two pairs of black eyes were blazing with a fierce scrutiny that suggested they were peering into each other's souls.

"Not this time, Francis Gleave!" breathed Furneaux. "You got away with murder once, but your trick is known now."

Gleave smiled in a ghastly manner.

"It was the dog," he muttered. "I would have beaten you but for the dog!"

Winter was standing over the two. He and Sheldon were probably the only calm persons present, because Colquhoun was dragging the whining and growling Cæsar to the door, where Evelyn and Marita had just entered, while the policemen and the few servants who had gathered in the hall had no notion whatsoever of the true inwardness of the tragedy which had begun and reached its climax so rapidly.

"What is it?" said the Chief coolly. "Another fish-bone?"

"He was fumbling in his waist-coat pocket," said Furneaux, not relaxing his vigilance for a second. "Don't search. It's dangerous. Wait till we can rip the cloth."

"But, man, look at him! He's dying!"

Gleave's face, always the tint of old ivory, was now greenish white. He had closed his eyes, but opened them when Winter's words reached him.

"Yes. It is the end," he said faintly. "I have paid the penalty of over-confidence. Ah, had I but acted sooner! I would have shaken the world!"

He looked at Furneaux with an almost wistful intensity.

"Little man," he whispered, "how did you guess?"

"One does not guess—one thinks," was the curious answer.

"But—after all these years—it is unreasonable."

"Your crime would have been discovered eleven years ago if we had been asked to assist," said Furneaux. "Even now we can prove that Sir Maurice Gleave did not kill Arthur Colquhoun. It was you who poisoned him with a fish-bone steeped in datura, such as you carry in your pocket at this moment."

"Yes. But what matter? I am growing cold. Before I die I want to be told how you *knew*."

"How did the dog know you were his enemy—a thing to be torn limb from limb?"

"Ah, the dog! It was Fate. I have always—hated—dogs. But the East—still keeps—her secret. Some day—she will reveal it—and then—your trivial science—your gross Empire—will shrivel up and die—as I—die now."

Gleave did not die, however, until an hour later. By

that time a doctor had examined him, and found that his spine had been broken by the fall. But he never recovered consciousness. The vital essence clung tenaciously to that almost emaciated frame. Men who had seen death in many forms could not say definitely when the spirit quitted the body. All they knew was that at one moment there was life—at another, no life.

Colquhoun had ascertained quickly that the two girls, as well as every other inmate of Leyton, had heard the explosion, while some of the servants had actually seen the gigantic tongue of flame which preceded it. Before Lady Weybourne, who had retired for the night, could veto the project Evelyn and Marita had gone to the garage, secured a car and driver, and were pelting along the eight miles to Keynham. They acted so promptly that they reached Greystones before a dense crowd had gathered, and Marita's known position in the household had gained them admission. Evelyn brought the dog with the vague notion that he would lend a species of protection. Neither she nor the other girl could form any idea of what had actually happened. Owing to the darkness they could not see the damaged houses and broken windows en route. Their first glimpse of reality was the lodge-keeper's assurance that although the Hall was greatly injured and had been on fire the place seemed safe enough now, while Mr. Gleave had undoubtedly escaped, as he was engaged with the police who were inquiring into the affair.

Colquhoun would not allow either of the girls to remain. His plea was that he could not control Cæsar if his mistress did not go at once, while Marita, far more frightened now than when she set out from Leyton, was only too glad to get back to the car and the comparative safety of the road. He refused to leave them until they were well clear of the village. Even

then they had a slow journey back, as the highway was thronged with people hurrying in the other direction. Public excitement was mounting rapidly. Gleave was yet alive when Winter sent a telephoned request to Norwich for reinforcements, and measures were taken to close all thoroughfares leading to Keynham until long after dawn.

The Chief did not attempt to make a detailed examination of the premises forthwith. He ascertained that the servants' quarters lay in a wing accessible by its own staircase only, so the household staff was rounded up and persuaded to go to their rooms. Their confidence was restored when they knew that a strong force of police would be on duty.

Gleave's body lay on the bed the man had occupied during life. Furneaux, watched with interest by his colleagues and with curiosity by the doctor, slit the cloth of the pocket on the right side of the waistcoat and extracted a little purse of chamois leather. In it were a number of tiny withered bones, each tipped with a brown stain.

"I don't like the look of those things," said the doctor instantly.

"All the same, I want you to take care of three specimens," said Furneaux. "You may be called on to prove that they were found in Gleave's possession. They are fish-bones, treated with the deadliest of Indian poisons—a sort of manufactured cobra-fang. Let that venom once get into the blood of any human being and the rest would be silence."

"God bless my soul!" cried the doctor. "Have they ever been used?"

"Not in Norfolk, I should imagine. But one of them came precious near my sensitive skin not so long ago, or perhaps it was meant for Gleave's, or it might have experimented on both of us. By the way, are you satisfied as to the cause of Gleave's death?"

"Absolutely. The immediate cause was heart failure induced by shock. The predisposing cause was fracture of the spine resulting from such a fall as you have described."

When Winter made sure that the house and grounds were thoroughly protected both inside and out he and the others left for the village, where, during some minutes, he had to deal with the press. They found Colquhoun waiting at "The Fisherman's Rest." From the windows of the sitting-room which faced seaward they watched the red and green eyes of a steamer heading cautiously for the little harbour. Luckily, owing to the accident of position, few of the inn's rooms were damaged, whereas houses exactly opposite were rendered untenantable.

"Hick may be here soon," said the Chief wearily. "I sent a couple of men in a boat to bring that craft in, and it is possible that the butler is on board."

In one respect he was mistaken. Hick had hired the yacht through a London agency, and was back in Norwich already. He heard of the explosion, made inquiries at police headquarters, and obtained a car without any great delay. His difficulty was to get through the police cordon, but he reached Keynham not long after the yacht was berthed. Though he was ready enough to speak now, his revelations were of no great value. Gleave employed him because of one distinct qualification—he could hold his tongue.

Furneaux was in great form after the excitement of the past hour.

"This affair promises to be an epic," he said, curling up in the depths of a big chair. "Holy smoke! What a story for the newspapers! It will all come out now. You, my squire of dames"—this with a grin at Colquhoun—"got away with the girls, of course?"

"I thought it was the best thing to do in the circumstances," said the soldier.

"It always is. The right place for a young man is in close contiguity to a young woman. Only one at a time, however. Did they quarrel?"

"No. They were far too frightened."

"And the dog? Did he calm down?"

"Very quickly, once we were out of the house."

"I wonder if we can keep the dog out of the evidence as well," put in the Chief.

"Best thing we can do," said Furneaux. "Fancy a coroner's jury being asked to accept the theory of metempsychosis!"

"Fancy anyone being asked to accept it," growled Bruce.

"Ah, you hard and fast scientists!" retorted Furneaux. "You reject what Plato believed, yet Cicero said he would rather be wrong with Plato than right with lesser men. How can you, who actually saw Gleave tonight, deny him all the attributes of a cat?"

"I don't. Each of us shares certain characteristics with animals—with some animals more than others, but that is no proof of a transmigration of souls."

"That noble hound was not troubled by fine points of distinction, was he? He sensed the cat in Gleave, and the fact that Gleave, on his human side, owned a most remarkable brain did not weigh with him for a second. . . . I'm glad you tackled Cæsar so promptly, Colquhoun. Miss Evelyn would cry her eyes out if a thick-headed coroner ordered his destruction. Have you told her what happened?"

"Of course not."

"Well, don't—ever. It's not nice."

"I wish that beastly fire had not taken place," said Bruce gloomily. "Instead of a highly complex installation of a new and remarkable order I shall find nothing tomorrow morning but some charred metal. Can all that radium have been destroyed? That, in itself, is a tremendous loss."

"Ah," sighed Furneaux, "I wish I could have played my best card, Mrs. Jenkins. She was going to admit me to the house early tomorrow."

Sheldon offered the opinion, which turned out to be well founded, that Gleave had probably packed the radium already, and the case might have escaped, since he seemed to have devised some means of isolating the fire to the exact area in which it was meant to operate. Evidently, he had planned to remove part of his appliances on the yacht.

Colquhoun took the opportunity to put a low-voiced question to the Chief.

"Although I was busy with the dog I couldn't help overhearing a little of what Furneaux said to Gleave," he confessed. "Have you any definite reason for the belief that Gleave killed my father?"

"Yes. We have known it for some months. And tonight Gleave confessed—boasted is, perhaps, the right word. He seemed to have had those horrible little fish-bones always available. He could not have foreseen the absurd and useless struggle between your father and Sir Maurice, but took advantage of it with the skill and readiness of a man who had murder in his heart. Bear in mind that we ordinary folk regard as murderous an action which to Gleave's disordered mind was quite natural and logical. I haven't the least doubt he prided himself mainly on a certain quickness of decision and manual accuracy of achievement in such matters. At any rate, it is certain that he plunged one of those poisoned darts into Mr. Colquhoun's throat through the corner of his mouth. It was found there, tightly lodged, but the fact that it was a small fish-bone, added to the prior conditions, altogether misled the doctors who conducted the post-mortem. Fortunately the record of the examination exists, and, by singular chance, the bone itself has been preserved. We had it analysed, and have been aware during the

past few weeks of the kind of poison used. Sir Maurice's letters from Portland put us on the track, while your strange connection with the affair of late has been extraordinarily helpful. I suppose you see what all this means to you?"

"If it implies any claim on Gleave's estate I shall not make it."

"Don't talk like a precious ass!" cried Winter indignantly. Furneaux caught that, and smirked.

"Hello!" he cackled. "More animal manifestations! Let's all go to bed before we turn into a menagerie!"

* * * * * * *

The "Gleave Mystery" became a nine days' wonder, and then faded from the public ken in the greater glamour of a sparkling divorce suit brilliantly staged in Mayfair, the shires and Monte Carlo. Wireless experts are still following up hints gathered from the wreckage of Gleave's plant. They have seen something definite in the rectangular arrangement of his aerials. Not alone the squares of the house itself but the hollow steel framework of every window and every pane held its insulated wire, the whole being connected to heavy cables of uncommon construction leading to the power-house and to a set of induction coils almost phenomenal in size and capacity. They know, too, that the properties of radium were utilised, and the mechanism of the electrically propelled car is regarded as of great consequence. That alone was the only complete apparatus they laid hands on. They are trying to persuade the Government to raise the sunken yacht, since it is believed she was not set on fire.

But these things are for the specialist and of the future, nor is the world likely to be a better and safer place for humanity if they are ever revealed. The two Indians proved worthless in the inquiry. Bruce and his colleagues soon found out that their technical

knowledge was crude and elementary. They were striving for political ends, and Gleave may have had some fantastic impulse toward achieving a certain dominance over mankind by that means. The golden triangle displayed by the Mahrattas was a symbol of unity between the principal castes of India. Gleave had one among his belongings.

The really striking sequel lay between the Treasury and the lawyers. The authorities claimed succession duty on Francis Gleave's estate, his heir in intestacy being Sir Maurice, but the law held that Arthur Colquhoun's rights came first, because his father's interests were extinguished by tort. A Chancery Judge and a legal referee may be trusted to straighten out the kinks in this dispute. Lady Weybourne is playing her part admirably. She will abide by the court's decision in so far as it may affect her. Messrs Smith, Son & Smith had kept Gleave's affairs in apple-pie order. That excellent firm is ready to serve anyone under order of the court.

It could only be assumed that the explosion at Greystones was brought about by the excessive zeal of the two constables who lost their lives. Baines admitted that they had noted the hidden passage to the cave, or excavation in the rock, made by the earlier generations of smugglers, and had resolved to examine the place when all was quiet for the night.

Sir Maurice Gleave, having received the King's Pardon, as the law puts it, has taken Francis's place as Marita's guardian. That young lady bids fair to become a great singer. Inquiry showed that Francis Gleave had actually been seized by a leopard when a boy, and Marita's father, himself a mere youth visiting Kashmir, had beaten off the brute with no more lethal weapon than a stout stake snatched from a garden fence. He was impoverished by the substitution of synthetic dyes for indigo, whereupon Gleave undertook

to provide for the girl's future. It was his one good action, and should be credited to him.

Knyvitt is building a new wing to "The Fisherman's Rest," and Brook is his chauffeur. Hick is butler to a K. B. E. Greystones itself will become the spacious and most attractive club-house of the Keynham Golf Links.

It was long before Arthur Colquhoun and Evelyn Hilton could renew the love idyll which flamed into such seemingly fleeting life that summer's afternoon in the park at Leyton. There can, however, be no financial bar to their marriage once the legal tangle disappears, and it is quite certain that they themselves contemplate a quiet wedding at an early date.

As Furneaux said to Winter when a very generous consignment from the Gleave wine-cellars reached them by direction of Sir Maurice:

"That young sojer had so much good luck that a share of it falls on us. Usually, James, the 'Yard' gets more kicks than ha'pence. Why should there be an exception this time?"

"It's the turning of the long worm, my boy," said the Chief. "Some people write history; we make it. And who knows that so well as Sir Maurice Gleave and those two young people? Here's to them!"

"And to your noble selves! By heck, Sheldon will open his other eye when he tastes this Chambertin!"

THE END

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